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THE
BLACK ROBE

BY
WILKIE COLLINS



IN THREE VOLUMES—VOL. III.

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THE STORY.

BOOK THE FOURTH—Continued.

CHAPTER VII.

THE IMPULSIVE SEX.

AFTER a lapse of a few days, Father Benwell was again a visitor at Ten Acres Lodge—by Romaine's invitation. The priest occupied the very chair, by the study fireside, in which Penrose had been accustomed to sit.

‘It is really kind of you to come to me,’ said Romaine, ‘so soon after receiving my acknowledgment of your letter. I can't tell you how I was touched by the manner in which you wrote of Penrose. To my shame I confess it, I had no idea that you were so warmly attached to him.’

‘I hardly knew it myself, Mr Romaine,

until our dear Arthur was taken away from us.'

'If you used your influence, Father Benwell, is there no hope that you might yet persuade him——?'

'To withdraw from the Mission? Oh, Mr. Romaine, don't you know Arthur's character better than that! Even his gentle temper has its resolute side. The zeal of the first martyrs to Christianity is the zeal that burns in that noble nature. The Mission has been the dream of his life—it is endeared to him by the very dangers which we dread. Persuade Arthur to desert the dear and devoted colleagues who have opened their arms to him? I might as soon persuade that statue in the garden to desert its pedestal, and join us in this room. Shall we change the sad subject? Have you

received the book which I sent you with my letter ? ’

Romayne took up the book from his desk. Before he could speak of it some one called out briskly, on the other side of the door, ‘ May I come in ? ’—and came in, without waiting to be asked. Mrs Eyre-court, painted and robed for the morning—wafting perfumes as she moved—appeared in the study. She looked at the priest, and lifted her many-ringed hands with a gesture of coquettish terror.

‘ Oh, dear me ! I had no idea you were here, Father Benwell. I ask ten thousand pardons. Dear and admirable Romayne, you don’t look as if you were pleased to see me. Good gracious ! I am not interrupting a confession, am I ? ’

Father Benwell (with his paternal smile

in perfect order) resigned his chair to Mrs. Eyrecourt. The traces of her illness still showed themselves in an intermittent trembling of her head and her hands. She had entered the room, strongly suspecting that the process of conversion might be proceeding in the absence of Penrose, and determined to interrupt it. Guided by his subtle intelligence, Father Benwell penetrated her motive as soon as she opened the door. Mrs. Eyrecourt bowed graciously, and took the offered chair. Father Benwell sweetened his paternal smile, and offered to get a footstool.

‘How glad I am,’ he said, ‘to see you in your customary good spirits! But wasn’t it just a little malicious to talk of interrupting a confession? As if Mr. Romaine was one of Us! Queen Elizabeth herself could

hardly have said a sharper thing to a poor Catholic priest ! ’

‘ You clever creature ! ’ said Mrs. Eyrecourt. ‘ How easily you see through a simple woman like me ! There—I give you my hand to kiss ; and I will never try to deceive you again. Do you know, Father Benwell, a most extraordinary wish has suddenly come to me. Please don’t be offended. I wish you were a Jew. ’

‘ May I ask why ? ’ Father Benwell inquired, with an apostolic suavity worthy of the best days of Rome.

Mrs. Eyrecourt explained herself with the modest self-distrust of a maiden of fifteen. ‘ I am really so ignorant, I hardly know how to put it. But learned persons have told me that it is the peculiarity of the Jews—may I say, the amiable peculiarity ?—never to

make converts. It would be so nice if you would take a leaf out of their book, when we have the happiness of receiving you here. My lively imagination pictures you in a double character. Father Benwell everywhere else; and—say, the patriarch Abraham at Ten Acres Lodge.’

Father Benwell lifted his persuasive hands in courteous protest. ‘My dear lady! pray make your mind easy. Not one word on the subject of religion has passed between Mr. Romaine and myself——’

‘I beg your pardon,’ Mrs. Eyrecourt interposed, ‘I am afraid I fail to follow you. My silent son-in-law looks as if he longed to smother me, and my attention is naturally distracted. You were about to say——?’

‘I was about to say, dear Mrs. Eyre-

court, that you are alarming yourself without any reason. Not one word, on any controversial subject, has passed——’

Mrs. Eyrecourt cocked her head, with the artless vivacity of a bird. ‘Ah, but it might though!’ she suggested slily.

Father Benwell once more remonstrated in dumb show, and Romaine lost his temper.

‘Mrs. Eyrecourt!’ he cried sternly.

Mrs. Eyrecourt screamed, and lifted her hands to her ears. ‘I am not deaf, dear Romaine, and I am not to be put down by any ill-timed exhibition of, what I may call, domestic ferocity. Father Benwell sets you an example of Christian moderation. Do, please, follow it.’

Romaine refused to follow it.

‘Talk on any other topic that you like,

Mrs. Eyrecourt. I request you—don't oblige me to use a harder word—I request you to spare Father Benwell and myself any further expression of your opinion on controversial subjects.'

A son-in-law may make a request, and a mother-in-law may decline to comply. Mrs. Eyrecourt declined to comply.

'No, Romaine, it won't do. I may lament your unhappy temper, for my daughter's sake—but I know what I am about, and you can't provoke me. Our reverend friend and I understand each other. He will make allowances for a sensitive woman, who has had sad experience of conversions in her own household. My eldest daughter, Father Benwell—a poor foolish creature—was converted into a nun-

nery. The last time I saw her (she used to be sweetly pretty ; my dear husband quite adored her)—the last time I saw her, she had a red nose, and, what is even more revolting at her age, a double chin. She received me with her lips pursed up, and her eyes on the ground, and she was insolent enough to say that she would pray for me. I am not a furious old man with a long white beard, and I don't curse my daughter and rush out into a thunderstorm afterwards—but *I* know what King Lear felt, and *I* have struggled with hysterics just as he did. With your wonderful insight into human nature, I am sure you will sympathise with and forgive me. Mr. Penrose, as my daughter tells me, behaved in the most gentlemanlike manner. I make the same

appeal to your kind forbearance. The bare prospect of our dear friend here becoming a Catholic——’

Romayne’s temper gave way once more.

‘If anything can make me a Catholic,’ he said, ‘your interference will do it.’

‘Out of sheer perversity, dear Romayne?’

‘Not at all, Mrs. Eyrecourt. If I became a Catholic, I might escape from the society of ladies, in the refuge of a monastery.’

Mrs. Eyrecourt hit him back again with the readiest dexterity.

‘Remain a Protestant, my dear, and go to your club. There is a refuge for you from the ladies—a monastery, with nice little dinners, and all the newspapers and periodicals.’ Having launched this shaft,

she got up, and recovered her easy courtesy of look and manner. 'I am so much obliged to you, Father Benwell. I have not offended you, I hope and trust?'

'You have done me a service, dear Mrs. Eyrecourt. But for your salutary caution I *might* have drifted into controversial subjects. I shall be on my guard now.'

'How very good of you! We shall meet again, I hope, under more agreeable circumstances. After that polite allusion to a monastery, I understand that my visit to my son-in-law may as well come to an end. Please don't forget five o'clock tea at my house.'

As she approached the door, it was opened from the outer side. Her daughter met her half-way. 'Why are you here, Mama?' Stella asked.

‘Why indeed, my love! You had better leave the room with me. Our amiable Romaine’s present idea is to relieve himself of our society by retiring to a monastery. Don’t you see Father Benwell?’

Stella coldly returned the priest’s bow—and looked at Romaine. She felt a vague forewarning of what had happened. Mrs. Eyrecourt proceeded to enlighten her, as an appropriate expression of gratitude. ‘We are indeed indebted to Father Benwell, my dear. He has been most considerate and kind——’

Romaine interrupted her without ceremony. ‘Favour me,’ he said, addressing his wife, ‘by inducing Mrs. Eyrecourt to continue her narrative in some other room.’

Stella was hardly conscious of what her

mother or her husband had said. She felt that the priest's eyes were on her. Under any other circumstances, Father Benwell's good breeding and knowledge of the world would have impelled him to take his departure. As things were, he knew perfectly well that the more seriously Romaine was annoyed, in his presence, the better his own private interests would be served. Accordingly, he stood apart, silently observant of Stella. In spite of Winterfield's reassuring reply to her letter, Stella instinctively suspected and dreaded the Jesuit. Under the spell of those watchful eyes she trembled inwardly; her customary tact deserted her; she made an indirect apology to the man whom she hated and feared.

‘Whatever my mother may have said

to you, Father Benwell, has been without my knowledge.'

Romayne attempted to speak, but Father Benwell was too quick for him.

'Dear Mrs. Romayne, nothing has been said which needs any disclaimer on your part.'

'I should think not!' Mrs. Eyrecourt added. 'Really, Stella, I don't understand you. Why may I not say to Father Benwell what you said to Mr. Penrose? You trusted Mr. Penrose as your friend. I can tell you this—I am quite sure you may trust Father Benwell.'

Once more Romayne attempted to speak. And, once more, Father Benwell was beforehand with him.

'May I hope,' said the priest, with a

finely ironical smile, 'that Mrs. Romaine agrees with her excellent mother?'

With all her fear of him, the exasperating influence of his tone and his look was more than Stella could endure. Before she could restrain them, the rash words flew out of her lips.

'I am not sufficiently well acquainted with you, Father Benwell, to express an opinion.'

With that answer, she took her mother's arm, and left the room.

The moment they were alone, Romaine turned to the priest, trembling with anger. Father Benwell, smiling indulgently at the lady's little outbreak, took him by the hand, with peace-making intentions. 'Now don't—pray don't excite yourself!'

Romaine was not to be pacified in that

way. His anger was trebly intensified by the long-continued strain on his nerves of the effort to control himself.

‘I must, and will, speak out at last!’ he said. ‘Father Benwell, the ladies of my household have inexcusably presumed on the consideration which is due to women. No words can say how ashamed I am of what has happened. I can only appeal to your admirable moderation and patience to accept my apologies, and the most sincere expression of my regret.’

‘No more, Mr. Romaine! As a favour to Me, I beg and entreat you will say no more. Sit down and compose yourself.’

But Romaine was impenetrable to the influence of friendly and forgiving demonstrations. ‘I can never expect you to enter my house again!’ he exclaimed.

‘My dear sir, I will come and see you again, with the greatest pleasure, on any day that you may appoint—the earlier day the better. Come! come! let us laugh. I don’t say it disrespectfully, but poor dear Mrs. Eyrecourt has been more amusing than ever. I expect to see our excellent Archbishop to-morrow, and I must really tell him how the good lady felt insulted when her Catholic daughter offered to pray for her. There is hardly anything more humorous, even in Molière. And the double chin, and the red nose—all the fault of those dreadful Papists. Oh, dear me, you still take it seriously. How I wish you had my sense of humour! When shall I come again, and tell you how the Archbishop likes the story of the nun’s mother?’

He held out his hand with irresistible

cordiality. Romaine took it gratefully—still bent, however, on making atonement.

‘Let me first do myself the honour of calling on You,’ he said. ‘I am in no state to open my mind—as I might have wished to open it to you—after what has happened. In a day or two more——’

‘Say the day after to-morrow,’ Father Benwell hospitably suggested. ‘Do me a great favour. Come and eat your bit of mutton at my lodgings. Six o’clock, if you like—and some remarkably good claret, a present from one of the Faithful. You will? That’s hearty! And do promise me to think no more of our little domestic comedy. Relieve your mind. Look at Wiseman’s Recollections of the Popes. Good-bye—God bless you!’

The servant who opened the house door

for Father Benwell was agreeably surprised by the Papist's cheerfulness. 'He isn't half a bad fellow,' the man announced among his colleagues. 'Gave me half-a-crown, and went out humming a tune.'

CHAPTER VIII.

FATHER BENWELL'S CORRESPONDENCE.

To the Secretary, S. J., Rome.

I.

I BEG to acknowledge the receipt of your letter.

You mention that our Reverend Fathers are discouraged at not having heard from me for more than six weeks, since I reported the little dinner given to Romaine at my lodgings.

I am sorry for this, and more than sorry to hear that my venerated brethren are beginning to despair of Romaine's conversion. Grant me a delay of another week—and,

if the prospects of the conversion have not sensibly improved in that time, I will confess myself defeated. Meanwhile, I bow to superior wisdom, without venturing to add a word in my own defence.

II.

The week's grace granted to me has elapsed. I write with humility. At the same time I have something to say for myself.

Yesterday, Mr. Lewis Romaine, of Vange Abbéy, was received into the community of the Holy Catholic Church. I enclose an accurate newspaper report of the ceremonies which attended the conversion.

Be pleased to inform me, by telegraph, whether our Reverend Fathers wish me to go on, or not.

THE STORY

BOOK THE FIFTH.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. EYRECOURT'S DISCOVERY.

THE leaves had fallen in the grounds at Ten Acres Lodge, and stormy winds told drearily that winter had come.

An unchanging dulness pervaded the house. Romaine was constantly absent in London, attending to his new religious duties under the guidance of Father Benwell. The litter of books and manuscripts in the study was seen no more. Hideously rigid order reigned in the unused room. Some of Romaine's papers had been burnt; others were imprisoned in drawers and cupboards—the history of the Origin of Religions had

taken its melancholy place among the suspended literary enterprises of the time. Mrs. Eyrecourt (after a superficially cordial reconciliation with her son-in-law) visited her daughter every now and then, as an act of maternal sacrifice. She yawned perpetually ; she read innumerable novels : she corresponded with her friends. In the long dull evenings, the once-lively lady sometimes openly regretted that she had not been born a man—with the three masculine resources of smoking, drinking, and swearing placed at her disposal. It was a dreary existence, and happier influences seemed but little likely to change it. Grateful as she was to her mother, no persuasion would induce Stella to leave Ten Acres and amuse herself in London. Mrs. Eyrecourt said, with melancholy and

metaphorical truth, 'There is no elasticity left in my child.'

On a dim grey morning, mother and daughter sat by the fireside, with another long day before them.

'Where is that contemptible husband of yours?' Mrs. Eyrecourt asked, looking up from her book.

'Lewis is staying in town,' Stella answered listlessly.

'In company with Judas Iscariot?'

Stella was too dull to immediately understand the allusion. 'Do you mean Father Benwell?' she inquired.

'Don't mention his name, my dear. I have re-christened him on purpose to avoid it. Even his name humiliates me. How completely the fawning old wretch took me

in—with all my knowledge of the world, too ! He was so nice and sympathetic—such a comforting contrast, on that occasion, to you and your husband—I declare I forgot every reason I had for not trusting him. Ah, we women are poor creatures—we may own it among ourselves. If a man only has nice manners and a pleasant voice, how many of us can resist him ? Even Romaine imposed upon me—assisted by his property, which in some degree excuses my folly. There is nothing to be done now, Stella, but to humour him. Do as that detestable priest does, and trust to your beauty (there isn't as much of it left as I could wish) to turn the scale in your favour. Have you any idea when the new convert will come back ? I heard him ordering a fish dinner for himself, yesterday—because it was Friday. Did you

join him at dessert-time, profanely supported by meat? What did he say?’

‘What he has said more than once already, Mama. His peace of mind is returning, thanks to Father Benwell. He was perfectly gentle and indulgent—but he looked as if he lived in a different world from mine. He told me he proposed to pass a week in, what he called, Retreat. I didn’t ask him what it meant. Whatever it is, I suppose he is there now.’

‘My dear, don’t you remember your sister began in the same way? *She* retreated. We shall have Romaine with a red nose and a double chin, offering to pray for us next! Do you recollect that French maid of mine—the woman I sent away, because she would spit, when she was out of temper, like a cat? I begin to think I treated the

poor creature harshly. When I hear of Romaine and his Retreat, I almost feel inclined to spit, myself. There! let us go on with our reading. Take the first volume—I have done with it.’

‘What is it, Mama?’

‘A very remarkable work, Stella, in the present state of light literature in England—a novel that actually tells a story. It’s quite incredible, I know. Try the book. It has another extraordinary merit—it isn’t written by a woman.’

Stella obediently received the first volume, turned over the leaves, and wearily dropped the wonderful novel on her lap. ‘I can’t attend to it,’ she said. ‘My mind is too full of my own thoughts.’

‘About Romaine?’ said her mother.

‘No. When I think of my husband now,

I almost wish I had his confidence in Priests and Retreats. The conviction grows on me, Mama, that my worst troubles are still to come. When I was younger, I don't remember being tormented by presentiments of any kind. Did I ever talk of presentiments to you, in the bygone days ?'

'If you had done anything of the sort, my love (excuse me, if I speak plainly), I should have said, "Stella, your liver is out of order;" and I should have opened the family medicine-chest. I will only say now send for the carriage; let us go to a morning concert, dine at a restaurant, and finish the evening at the play.'

'This characteristic proposal was entirely thrown away on Stella. She was absorbed in pursuing her own train of thought. 'I

almost wish I had told Lewis,' she said to herself absently.

'Told him of what, my dear?'

'Of what happened to me with Winterfield.'

Mrs. Eyrecourt's faded eyes opened wide in astonishment.

'Do you really mean it?' she asked.

'I do, indeed.'

'Are you actually simple enough, Stella, to think that a man of Romaine's temper would have made you his wife if you had told him of the Brussels marriage?'

'Why not?'

'Why not! Would Romaine—would any man—believe that you really did part from Winterfield at the church door? Considering that you are a married woman, your innocence, my sweet child, is a perfect

phenomenon! It's well there were wiser people than you to keep your secret.'

'Don't speak too positively, Mama. Lewis may find it out yet.'

'Is that one of your presentiments?'

'Yes.'

'How is he to find it out, if you please?'

'I am afraid, through Father Benwell. Yes! yes! I know you only think him a fawning old hypocrite—you don't fear him as I do. Nothing will persuade me that zeal for his religion is the motive under which that man acts in devoting himself to Romaine. He has some abominable object in view, and his eyes tell me that I am concerned in it.'

Mrs. Eyrecourt burst out laughing.

'What is there to laugh at?' Stella asked.

‘ I declare, my dear, there is something absolutely provoking in your utter want of knowledge of the world ! When you are puzzled to account for anything remarkable in a clergyman’s conduct (I don’t care, my poor child, to what denomination he belongs) you can’t be wrong in attributing his motive to—Money. If Romaine had turned Baptist or Methodist, the reverend gentleman in charge of his spiritual welfare would not have forgotten—as you have forgotten, you little goose—that his convert was a rich man. His mind would have dwelt on the chapel, or the mission, or the infant school, in want of funds ; and—with no more abominable object in view than I have, at this moment, in poking the fire—he would have ended in producing his modest subscription list, and would have betrayed himself (just

as our odious Benwell will betray himself) by the two amiable little words, Please contribute. Is there any other presentiment, my dear, on which you would like to have your mother's candid opinion ? '

Stella resignedly took up the book again.

'I dare say you are right,' she said.
'Let us read our novel.'

Before she had reached the end of the first page, her mind was far away again from the unfortunate story. She was thinking of that 'other presentiment,' which had formed the subject of her mother's last satirical inquiry. The vague fear that had shaken her when she had accidentally touched the French boy, on her visit to Camp's Hill, still from time to time troubled her memory. Even the event of his death had failed to

dissipate the delusion, which associated him with some undefined evil influence that might yet assert itself. A superstitious forewarning of this sort was a weakness new to her in her experience of herself. She was heartily ashamed of it—and yet, it kept its hold. Once more the book dropped on her lap. She laid it aside, and walked wearily to the window to look at the weather.

Almost at the same moment Mrs. Eyrecourt's maid disturbed her mistress over the second volume of the novel by entering the room with a letter.

‘For me?’ Stella asked, looking round from the window.

‘No, ma’am—for Mrs. Eyrecourt.’

The letter had been brought to the house by one of Lady Loring's servants. In delivering it he had apparently given private

instructions to the maid. She laid her finger significantly on her lips when she gave the letter to her mistress.

In these terms Lady Loring wrote :—

‘If Stella happens to be with you, when you receive my note, don’t say anything which will let her know that I am your correspondent. She has always, poor dear, had an inveterate distrust of Father Benwell ; and, between ourselves, I am not sure that she is quite so foolish as I once thought. The Father has unexpectedly left us— with a well-framed excuse which satisfied Lord Loring. It fails to satisfy Me. Not from any wonderful exercise of penetration on my part, but in consequence of something I have just heard in course of conversation with a Catholic friend. Father Benwell, my dear, turns out to be a Jesuit ;

and, what is more, a person of such high authority in the Order, that his concealment of his rank, while he was with us, must have been a matter of necessity. He must have had some very serious motive for occupying a position so entirely beneath him as his position in our house. I have not the shadow of a reason for associating this startling discovery with dear Stella's painful misgivings—and yet there is something in my mind which makes me want to hear what Stella's mother thinks. Come and have a talk about it as soon as you possibly can.'

Mrs. Eyrecourt put the letter in her pocket, smiling quietly to herself.

Applying to Lady Loring's letter the infallible system of solution which she had revealed to her daughter, Mrs. Eyrecourt solved the mystery of the priest's conduct

without a moment's hesitation. Lord Loring's cheque, in Father Benwell's pocket, representing such a liberal subscription that my lord was reluctant to mention it to my lady—there was the reading of the riddle, as plain as the sun at noonday! Would it be desirable to enlighten Lady Loring as she had already enlightened Stella? Mrs. Eyrecourt decided in the negative. As Roman Catholics, and as old friends of Romaine, the Lorings naturally rejoiced in his conversion. But, as old friends also of Romaine's wife, they were bound not to express their sentiments too openly. Feeling that any discussion of the priest's motives would probably lead to the delicate subject of the conversion, Mrs. Eyrecourt prudently determined to let the matter drop. As a consequence of this decision, Stella was left

without the slightest warning of the catastrophe which was now close at hand.

Mrs. Eyrecourt joined her daughter at the window.

‘Well, my dear, is it clearing up? Shall we take a drive before luncheon?’

‘If you like, Mama.’

She turned to her mother as she answered. The light of the clearing sky, at once soft and penetrating, fell full on her. Mrs. Eyrecourt, looking at her as usual, suddenly became serious: she studied her daughter’s face with an eager and attentive scrutiny.

‘Do you see any extraordinary change in me?’ Stella asked, with a faint smile.

Instead of answering, Mrs. Eyrecourt put her arm round Stella with a loving gentleness, entirely at variance with any ordinary

expression of her character. The worldly mother's eyes rested with a lingering tenderness on the daughter's face. 'Stella!' she said softly—and stopped, at a loss for words for the first time in her life.

After a while, she began again. 'Yes; I see a change in you,' she whispered—'an interesting change which tells me something. Can you guess what it is?'

Stella's colour rose brightly, and faded again. She laid her head in silence on her mother's bosom. Worldly, frivolous, self-interested, Mrs. Eyrecourt's nature was the nature of a woman—and the one great trial and triumph of a woman's life, appealing to her as a trial and a triumph soon to come to her own child, touched fibres under the hardened surface of her heart which were still unprofaned.' 'My poor darling,' she

said, 'have you told the good news to your husband?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'He doesn't care, now, for anything that I can tell him.'

'Nonsense, Stella! You may win him back to you by a word—and do you hesitate to say the word? *I* shall tell him!'

Stella suddenly drew herself away from her mother's caressing arm. 'If you do,' she cried, 'no words can say how inconsiderate and how cruel I shall think you. Promise—on your word of honour—promise you will leave it to me!'

'Will you tell him, yourself—if I leave it to you?'

'Yes—at my own time. Promise!'

‘Hush, hush! don’t excite yourself, my love; I promise. Give me a kiss. I declare I am agitated myself!’ she exclaimed, falling back into her customary manner. ‘Such a shock to my vanity, Stella—the prospect of becoming a grandmother! I really must ring for Matilda, and take a few drops of red lavender. Be advised by me, my poor dear, and we will turn the priest out of the house yet. When Romaine comes back from his ridiculous Retreat—after his fasting and flagellation, and Heaven knows what besides—*then* bring him to his senses; then is the time to tell him. Will you think of it?’

‘Yes; I will think of it.’

‘And one word more, before Matilda comes in. Remember the vast importance

of having a male heir to Vange Abbey. On these occasions you may practise with perfect impunity on the ignorance of the men. Tell him you're sure it's going to be a boy !'

CHAPTER II.

THE SEED IS SOWN.

SITUATED in a distant quarter of the vast western suburb of London, the house called The Retreat stood in the midst of a well-kept garden, protected on all sides by a high brick wall. Excepting the grand gilt cross on the roof of the chapel, nothing revealed externally the devotional purpose to which the Roman Catholic priesthood (assisted by the liberality of 'the Faithful') had dedicated the building.

But the convert privileged to pass the gates left Protestant England outside, and found himself, as it were, in a new country.

Inside The Retreat, the paternal care of the Church took possession of him ; surrounded him with monastic simplicity in his neat little bedroom ; and dazzled him with devotional splendour when his religious duties called him into the chapel. The perfect taste—so seldom found in the modern arrangement and decoration of convents and churches in southern countries—showed itself here, pressed into the service of religion, in every part of the house. The severest discipline had no sordid and hideous side to it in The Retreat. The inmates fasted on spotless table cloths, and handled knives and forks (the humble servants of half-filled stomachs) without a speck on their decent brightness. Penitents who kissed the steps of the altar (to use the expressive Oriental phrase), ‘eat no dirt.’ Friends,

liberal friends, permitted to visit the inmates on stated days, saw copies of famous Holy Families in the reception room which were really works of Art ; and trod on a carpet of studiously modest pretensions, exhibiting pious emblems beyond reproach in colour and design. The Retreat had its own artesian well ; not a person in the house drank impurity in his water. A faint perfume of incense was perceptible in the corridors. The soothing and mysterious silence of the place was intensified rather than disturbed by soft footsteps, and gentle opening and closing of doors. Animal life was not even represented by a cat in the kitchen. And yet, pervaded by some inscrutable influence, the house was not dull. Heretics, with lively imaginations, might

have not inappropriately likened it to an enchanted castle. In one word, the Catholic system here showed to perfection its masterly knowledge of the weakness of human nature, and its inexhaustible dexterity in adapting the means to the end.

On the morning when Mrs. Eyrecourt and her daughter held their memorable interview by the fireside at Ten Acres, Father Benwell entered one of the private rooms at The Retreat, devoted to the use of the priesthood. The demure attendant, waiting humbly for instructions, was sent to request the presence of one of the inmates of the house, named Mortleman.

Father Benwell's customary serenity was a little ruffled, on this occasion, by an appearance of anxiety. More than once he looked impatiently towards the door, and he never

even noticed the last new devotional publications laid invitingly on the table.

Mr. Mortleman made his appearance—a young man, and a promising convert. The wild brightness of his eyes revealed that incipient form of brain disease which begins in fanaticism, and ends not infrequently in religious madness. His manner of greeting the priest was absolutely servile. He cringed before the illustrious Jesuit.

Father Benwell took no notice of these demonstrations of humility. ‘Be seated, my son,’ he said. Mr. Mortleman looked as if he would have preferred going down on his knees—but he yielded, and took a chair.

‘I think you have been Mr. Romaine’s companion for a few days, in the hours of recreation?’ the priest began.

‘Yes, Father.’

‘Does he appear to be at all weary of his residence in this house?’

‘Oh, far from it! He feels the benign influence of The Retreat; we have had some delightful hours together.’

‘Have you anything to report?’

Mr. Mortleman crossed his hands on his breast, and bowed profoundly. ‘I have to report of myself, Father, that I have committed the sin of presumption. I presumed that Mr. Romaine was, like myself, not married.’

‘Have I spoken to you on that subject?’

‘No, Father.’

‘Then you have committed no sin. You have only made an excusable mistake. How were you led into error?’

‘In this way, Father. Mr. Romaine had been speaking to me of a book which

you had been so good as to send to him. He had been especially interested by the memoir therein contained of the illustrious Englishman, Cardinal Acton. The degrees by which his Eminence rose to the rank of a Prince of the Church seemed, as I thought, to have aroused in my friend a new sense of vocation. He asked me if I myself aspired to belong to the holy priesthood. I answered that this was indeed my aspiration, if I might hope to be found worthy. He appeared to be deeply affected. I ventured to ask if he too had the same prospect before him. He grieved me indescribably. He sighed and said, "I have no such hope; I am married." Tell me, Father, I entreat you, have I done wrong?'

Father Benwell considered for a moment.

‘Did Mr. Romaine say anything more?’ he asked.

‘No, Father.’

‘Did you attempt to return to the subject?’

‘I thought it best to be silent.’

Father Benwell held out his hand. ‘My young friend, you have not only done no wrong—you have shown the most commendable discretion. I will detain you no longer from your duties. Go to Mr. Romaine, and say that I wish to speak with him.’

Mr. Mortleman dropped on one knee, and begged for a blessing. Father Benwell lifted the traditional two fingers, and gave the blessing. The conditions of human happiness are easily fulfilled if we rightly understand them. Mr. Mortleman retired perfectly happy.

Left by himself again, Father Penwell paced the room rapidly from end to end. The disturbing influence visible in his face had now changed from anxiety to excitement. ‘I’ll try it to-day!’ he said to himself—and stopped, and looked round him doubtfully. ‘No, not here,’ he decided; ‘it may get talked about too soon. It will be safer in every way at my lodgings.’ He recovered his composure, and returned to his chair.

Romayne opened the door.

The double influence of the conversion, and of the life in The Retreat, had already changed him. His customary keenness and excitability of look had subsided, and had left nothing in their place but an expression of suave and meditative repose. All his troubles were now in the hands of his priest.

There was a passive regularity in his bodily movements and a beatific serenity in his smile.

‘My dear friend,’ said Father Benwell, cordially shaking hands, ‘you were good enough to be guided by my advice in entering this house. Be guided by me again, when I say that you have been here long enough. You can return, after an interval, if you wish it. But I have something to say to you first—and I beg to offer the hospitality of my lodgings.’

The time had been when Romaine would have asked for some explanation of this abrupt notice of removal. Now, he passively accepted the advice of his spiritual director. Father Benwell made the necessary communication to the authorities, and Romaine took leave of his friends in The Retreat.

The great Jesuit and the great landowner left the place, with becoming humility, in a cab.

‘ I hope I have not disappointed you? ’
said Father Benwell.

‘ I am only anxious,’ Romaine answered,
‘ to hear what you have to say.’

CHAPTER III.

THE HARVEST IS REAPED.

ON their way through the streets, Father Benwell talked as persistently of the news of the day as if he had nothing else in his thoughts. To keep his companion's mind in a state of suspense was, in certain emergencies, to exert a useful preparatory influence over a man of Romaine's character. Even when they reached his lodgings, the priest still hesitated to approach the object that he had in view. He made considerate inquiries, in the character of a hospitable man.

‘ They breakfast early at The Retreat,’ he said. ‘ What may I offer you? ’

‘ I want nothing, thank you,’ Romaine answered, with an effort to control his habitual impatience of needless delay.

‘ Pardon me—we have a long interview before us, I fear. Our bodily necessities, Romaine (excuse me if I take the friendly liberty of suppressing the formal “Mr.”)—our bodily necessities are not to be trifled with. A bottle of my famous claret, and a few biscuits, will not hurt either of us.’ He rang the bell, and gave the necessary directions. ‘ Another damp day!’ he went on cheerfully. ‘ I hope you don’t pay the rheumatic penalties of a winter residence in England? Ah, this glorious country would be too perfect if it possessed the delicious climate of Rome!’

The wine and biscuits were brought in. Father Benwell filled the glasses, and bowed cordially to his guest.

‘Nothing of this sort at The Retreat!’ he said gaily. ‘Excellent water, I am told—which is a luxury in its way, especially in London. Well, my dear Romaine, I must begin by making my apologies. You no doubt thought me a little abrupt in running away with you from your retirement at a moment’s notice?’

‘I believed that you had good reasons, Father—and that was enough for me.’

‘Thank you—you do me justice—it was in your best interests that I acted. There are men of phlegmatic temperament, over whom the wise monotony of discipline at The Retreat exercises a wholesome influence—I mean an influence which may be prolonged

with advantage. You are not one of those persons. Protracted seclusion and monotony of life are morally and mentally unprofitable to a man of your ardent disposition. I abstained from mentioning these reasons, at the time, out of a feeling of regard for our excellent resident director, who believes unreservedly in the institution over which he presides. Very good! The Retreat has done all that it could usefully do in your case. We must think next of how to employ that mental activity which, rightly developed, is one of the most valuable qualities that you possess. Let me ask, first, if you have in some degree recovered your tranquillity?’

‘I feel like a different man, Father Benwell.’

‘That’s right! And your nervous sufferings—I don’t ask what they are; I only

want to know if you experience a sense of relief? ’

‘A most welcome sense of relief,’ Romaine answered, with a revival of the enthusiasm of other days. ‘The complete change in all my thoughts and convictions, which I owe to you——’

‘And to dear Penrose,’ Father Benwell interposed, with the prompt sense of justice which no man could more becomingly assume. ‘We must not forget Arthur.’

‘Forget him?’ Romaine repeated. ‘Not a day passes without my thinking of him. It is one of the happy results of the change in me that my mind does not dwell bitterly on the loss of him now. I think of Penrose with admiration, as of one whose glorious life, with all its dangers, I should like to share!’

He spoke with a rising colour and brightening eyes. Already, the absorbent capacity of the Roman Church had drawn to itself that sympathetic side of his character which was also one of its strongest sides. Already, his love for Penrose—hitherto inspired by the virtues of the man—had narrowed its range to sympathy with the trials and privileges of the priest. Truly and deeply indeed had the physician consulted, in by-gone days, reasoned on Romaine's case! That 'occurrence of some new and absorbing influence in his life,' of which the doctor had spoken—that 'working of some complete change in his habits of thought'—had found its way to him at last, after the wife's simple devotion had failed, through the subtler ministrations of the priest.

Some men, having Father Benwell's

object in view, would have taken instant advantage of the opening offered to them by Romaine's unguarded enthusiasm. The illustrious Jesuit held fast by the wise maxim which forbade him to do anything in a hurry.

‘No,’ he said, ‘your life must not be the life of our dear friend. The service on which the Church employs Penrose is not the fit service for you. You have other claims on us.’

Romaine looked at his spiritual adviser with a momentary change of expression—a relapse into the ironical bitterness of the past time.

‘Have you forgotten that I am, and can be, only a layman?’ he asked. ‘What claims can I have, except the common claim of all faithful members of the Church on the

good offices of the priesthood? ' He paused for a moment, and continued with the abruptness of a man struck by a new idea. ' Yes ! I have perhaps one small claim of my own—the claim of being allowed to do my duty.'

' In what respect, dear Romaine ? '

' Surely you can guess ? I am a rich man ; I have money lying idle, which it is my duty (and my privilege) to devote to the charities and necessities of the Church. And, while I am speaking of this, I must own that I am a little surprised at your having said nothing to me on the subject. You have never yet pointed out to me the manner in which I might devote my money to the best and noblest uses. Was it forgetfulness on your part ? '

Father Benwell shook his head. ' No,' he replied ; ' I can't honestly say that.'

‘Then you had a reason for your silence?’

‘Yes.’

‘May I not know it?’

Father Benwell got up and walked to the fireplace. Now there are various methods of getting up and walking to a fireplace, and they find their way to outward expression through the customary means of look and manner. We may feel cold, and may only want to warm ourselves. Or we may feel restless, and may need an excuse for changing our position. Or we may feel modestly confused, and may be anxious to hide it. Father Benwell, from head to foot, expressed modest confusion, and polite anxiety to hide it.

‘My good friend,’ he said, ‘I am afraid of hurting your feelings.’

Romayne was a sincere convert, but there were instincts still left in him which resented this expression of regard, even when it proceeded from a man whom he respected and admired. ‘You will hurt my feelings,’ he answered a little sharply, ‘if you are not plain with me.’

‘Then I *will* be plain with you,’ Father Benwell rejoined. ‘The Church—speaking through me, as her unworthy interpreter—feels a certain delicacy in approaching You on the subject of money.’

‘Why?’

Father Benwell left the fireplace, without immediately answering. He opened a drawer, and took out of it a flat mahogany box. His gracious familiarity became transformed, by some mysterious process of congelation, into a dignified formality of

manner. The priest took the place of the man.

‘The Church, Mr. Romaine, hesitates to receive, as benevolent contributions, money derived from property of its own, arbitrarily taken from it, and placed in a layman’s hands. No!’ he cried, interrupting Romaine, who instantly understood the allusion to Vange Abbey—‘No! I must beg you to hear me out. I state the case plainly, at your own request. At the same time, I am bound to admit that the lapse of centuries has, in the eye of the law, sanctioned the deliberate act of robbery perpetrated by Henry the Eighth. You have lawfully inherited Vange Abbey from your ancestors. The Church is not unreasonable enough to assert a merely moral right against the law of the country. It may feel the act of

spoliation—but it submits.’ He unlocked the flat mahogany box, and gently dropped his dignity : the man took the place of the priest. ‘As the master of Vange,’ he said, ‘you may be interested in looking at a little historical curiosity which we have preserved. The title-deeds, dear Romaine, by which the monks held your present property, in *their* time. Take another glass of wine.’

Romaine looked at the title-deeds, and laid them aside unread.

Father Benwell had roused his pride, his sense of justice, his wild and lavish instincts of generosity. He, who had always despised money—except when it assumed its only estimable character, as a means for the attainment of merciful and noble ends—he was in possession of property to which he had no moral right : without even the poor

excuse of associations which attached him to the place.

‘I hope I have not offended you?’ said Father Benwell.

‘You have made me ashamed of myself,’ Romaine answered warmly. ‘On the day when I became a Catholic, I ought to have remembered Vange. Better late than never. I refuse to take shelter under the law—I respect the moral right of the Church. I will at once restore the property which I have usurped.’

Father Benwell took both Romaine’s hands in his, and pressed them fervently.

‘I am proud of you!’ he said. ‘We shall all be proud of you, when I write word to Rome of what has passed between us. But—no, Romaine!—this must not be. I admire you, I feel with you; and I refuse.’

On behalf of the Church, I say it—I refuse the gift.’

‘Wait a little, Father Benwell! You don’t know the state of my affairs. I don’t deserve the admiration which you feel for me. The loss of the Vange property will be no pecuniary loss, in my case. I have inherited a fortune from my aunt. My income from that source is far larger than my income from the Yorkshire property.’

‘Romaine, it must not be!’

‘Pardon me, it must be. I have more money than I can spend—without Vange. And I have painful associations with the house which disincline me ever to enter it again.’

Even this confession failed to move Father Benwell. He obstinately crossed his arms, obstinately tapped his foot on the floor.

‘No!’ he said. ‘Plead as generously as you may, my answer is, No.’

Romayne only became more resolute on his side. ‘The property is absolutely my own,’ he persisted. ‘I am without a near relation in the world. I have no children. My wife is already provided for at my death, out of the fortune left me by my aunt. It is downright obstinacy—forgive me for saying so—to persist in your refusal.’

‘It is downright duty, Romayne. If I gave way to you, I should be the means of exposing the priesthood to the vilest misinterpretation. I should be deservedly reprimanded, and your proposed deed of gift would, without a moment’s hesitation, be torn up. If you have any regard for me, drop the subject.’

Romayne refused to yield, even to this unanswerable appeal.

‘Very well,’ he said, ‘there is one document you can’t tear up. You can’t interfere with my making another will. I shall leave the Vange property to the Church, and I shall appoint you one of the trustees. You can’t object to that.’

Even rigorous Father Benwell was now at a loss for any further expression of honourable protest. He could only plead sadly and submissively for an immediate change of subject. ‘No more, dear Romayne—you distress me! What were we talking of, before this unfortunate topic turned up?’

He filled the glasses; he offered more biscuits—he was really, and even percep-

tibly, agitated by the victory that he had won.

Refusing a deed of gift in Romaine's lifetime, in the fear that it might lead to a public scandal, he had gained the Vange property for the Church by the safer means of a legacy, which (especially in the absence of an heir) would be an unassailable proof of the testator's attachment to the Catholic Faith. But one last necessity now confronted him—the necessity of placing a serious obstacle in the way of any future change of purpose on the part of Romaine. As to the choice of that obstacle, Father Benwell's mind had been made up for some time past.

For a few minutes he walked up and down the room, without looking at his guest.

‘What *was* it I had to say to you?’ he

resumed. ‘Surely, I was speaking on the subject of your future life, and the right employment of your energies?’

‘You are very kind, Father Benwell. The subject has little interest for me. My future life is shaped out—domestic retirement, ennobled by religious duties.’

Still pacing the room, Father Benwell stopped at that reply, and put his hand kindly on Romaine’s shoulder.

‘We don’t allow a good Catholic to drift into domestic retirement, who is worthy of better things,’ he said. ‘The Church, Romaine, wishes to make use of you. I never flattered anyone in my life, but I may say before your face what I have said behind your back. A man of your strict sense of honour—of your intellect—of your high aspirations—of your personal charm

and influence—is not a man whom we can allow to run to waste. Open your mind, my friend, fairly to me, and I will open my mind fairly to you. Let me set the example. I say it, with authority; an enviable future is before you.’

Romayne’s pale cheeks flushed with excitement. ‘What future?’ he asked eagerly. ‘Am I free to choose? Must I remind you that a man with a wife cannot think only of himself?’

‘Suppose you were *not* a man with a wife.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Romayne; I am trying to break my way through that inveterate reserve which is one of the failings in your character. Unless you can prevail on yourself to tell me those secret thoughts, those unexpressed

regrets, which you can confide to no other man, this conversation must come to an end. Is there no yearning, in your inmost soul, for anything beyond the position which you now occupy?'

There was a pause. The flush on Romaine's face faded away. He was silent.

'You are not in the confessional,' Father Benwell reminded him, with melancholy submission to circumstances. 'You are under no obligation to answer me.'

Romaine roused himself. He spoke in low reluctant tones. 'I am afraid to answer you,' he said.

That apparently discouraging reply armed Father Benwell with the absolute confidence of success, which he had thus far failed to feel. He wound his way deeper and deeper into Romaine's mind, with the delicate

ingenuity of penetration, of which the practice of years had made him master.

‘Perhaps I have failed to make myself clearly understood,’ he said. ‘I will try to put it more plainly. You are no half-hearted man, Romaine. What you believe, you believe fervently. Impressions are not dimly and slowly produced on *your* mind. As the necessary result, your conversion being once accomplished, your whole soul is given to the Faith that is in you. Do I read your character rightly?’

‘So far as I know it—yes.’

Father Benwell went on.

‘Bear in mind what I have just said,’ he resumed; ‘and you will understand why I feel it my duty to press the question which you have not answered yet. You have found in the Catholic Faith the peace of mind

which you have failed to obtain by other means. If I had been dealing with an ordinary man, I should have expected from the change no happier result than this. But I ask You, has that blessed influence taken no deeper and nobler hold on your heart? Can you truly say to me, "I am content with what I have gained; I wish for no more?"

'I cannot truly say it,' Romaine answered.

The time had now come for speaking plainly. Father Benwell no longer advanced to his end under cover of a cloud of words.

'A little while since,' he said, 'you spoke of Penrose, as of a man whose lot in life you longed to share. The career which has associated him with an Indian mission

is, as I told you, only adapted to a man of his special character and special gifts. But the career which has carried him into the sacred ranks of the priesthood is open to every man who feels the sense of divine vocation, which has made Penrose one of Us.'

'No, Father Benwell! Not open to every man.'

'I say, Yes!'

'It is not open to Me!'

'I say it is open to You. And more—I enjoin, I command, you to dismiss from your mind all merely human obstacles and discouragements. They are beneath the notice of a man who feels himself called to the priesthood. Give me your hand, Romaine! Does your conscience tell you that you are that man?'

Romayne started to his feet, shaken to the soul by the solemnity of the appeal.

‘I can’t dismiss the obstacles that surround me!’ he cried passionately. ‘To a man in my position, your advice is absolutely useless. The ties that bind me are beyond the limit of a priest’s sympathies.’

‘Nothing is beyond the limit of a priest’s sympathies.’

‘Father Benwell, I am married!’

Father Benwell folded his arms over his breast—looked with immovable resolution straight in Romayne’s face—and struck the blow which he had been meditating for months past.

‘Rouse your courage,’ he said sternly. ‘You are no more married than I am.’

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE ROAD TO ROME.

THERE was not a sound in the room. Romaine stood, looking at the priest.

‘Did you hear what I said?’ Father Benwell asked.

‘Yes.’

‘Do you understand that I really mean what I said?’

He made no reply—he waited, like a man expecting to hear more.

Father Benwell was alive to the vast importance, at such a moment, of not shrinking from the responsibility which he had assumed. ‘I see how I distress you,’ he

said ; ‘ but, for your sake, I am bound to speak out. Romaine ! the woman whom you have married is the wife of another man. Don’t ask me how I know it—I do know it. You shall have positive proof, as soon as you have recovered. Come ! rest a little in the easy chair.’

He took Romaine’s arm, and led him to the chair, and made him drink some wine. They waited awhile. Romaine lifted his head, with a heavy sigh.

‘ The woman whom I have married is the wife of another man.’ He slowly repeated the words, to himself—and then looked at Father Benwell.

‘ Who is the man ? ’ he asked.

‘ I introduced you to him, when I was as ignorant of the circumstances as you are,’

the priest answered. 'The man is Mr. Bernard Winterfield.'

Romayne half raised himself from the chair. A momentary anger glittered in his eyes, and faded out again, extinguished by the nobler emotions of grief and shame. He remembered Winterfield's introduction to Stella.

'Her husband!' he said, speaking again to himself. 'And she let me introduce him to her. And she received him like a stranger.' He paused, and thought of it. 'The proofs, if you please, sir,' he resumed with sudden humility. 'I don't want to hear any particulars. It will be enough for me if I know beyond all doubt that I have been deceived and disgraced.'

Father Benwell unlocked his desk and

placed two papers before Romaine. He did his duty with a grave indifference to all minor considerations. The time had not yet come for expressions of sympathy and regret.

* ‘The first paper,’ he said, ‘is a certified copy of the register of the marriage of Miss Eyrecourt to Mr. Winterfield, celebrated (as you will see) by the English chaplain at Brussels, and witnessed by three persons. Look at the names.’

The bride’s mother was the first witness. The two names that followed were the names of Lord and Lady Loring. ‘*They*, too, in the conspiracy to deceive me!’ Romaine said as he laid the paper back on the table.

‘I obtained that piece of written evidence,’ Father Benwell proceeded, ‘by the

help of a reverend colleague of mine, residing at Brussels. I will give you his name and address, if you wish to make further inquiries.'

'Quite needless. What is this other paper?'

'This other paper is an extract from the shorthand writer's notes (suppressed in the reports of the public journals) of proceedings in an English court of law, obtained at my request by my lawyer in London.'

'What have I to do with it?'

He put the question in a tone of passive endurance—resigned to the severest moral martyrdom that could be inflicted on him.

'I will answer you in two words,' said Father Benwell. 'In justice to Miss Eyre-court, I am bound to produce her excuse for marrying you.'

Romayne looked at him in stern amazement.

‘Excuse!’ he repeated.

‘Yes—excuse. The proceedings to which I have alluded declare Miss Eyre-court’s marriage to Mr. Winterfield to be null and void—by the English law—in consequence of his having been married at the time to another woman. Try to follow me. I will put it as briefly as possible. In justice to yourself, and to your future career, you must understand this revolting case thoroughly, from beginning to end.’

With those prefatory words, he told the story of Winterfield’s first marriage; altering nothing; concealing nothing; doing the fullest justice to Winterfield’s innocence of all evil motive, from first to last. When the plain truth served his purpose, as it most

assuredly did in this case, the man has never yet been found who could match Father Benwell at stripping himself of every vestige of reserve, and exhibiting his naked heart to the moral admiration of mankind.

‘You were mortified, and I was surprised,’ he went on, ‘when Mr. Winterfield dropped his acquaintance with you. We now know that he acted like an honourable man.’

He waited to see what effect he had produced. Romaine was in no state of mind to do justice to Winterfield or to any one. His pride was mortally wounded; his high sense of honour and delicacy writhed under the outrage inflicted on it.

‘And mind this,’ Father Benwell persisted, ‘poor human nature has its right to all that can be justly conceded in the way of

excuse and allowance. Miss Eyrecourt would naturally be advised by her friends, would naturally be eager, on her own part, to keep hidden from you what happened at Brussels. A sensitive woman, placed in a position so horribly false and degrading, must not be too severely judged, even when she does wrong. I am bound to say this—and more. Speaking from my own knowledge of all the parties, I have no doubt that Miss Eyrecourt and Mr. Winterfield did really part at the church door.’

Romayne answered by a look—so disdainfully expressive of the most immovable unbelief, that it absolutely justified the fatal advice by which Stella’s worldly-wise friends had encouraged her to conceal the truth. Father Benwell prudently closed his lips. He had put the case with perfect fairness—

his bitterest enemy could not have denied that.

Romayne took up the second paper, looked at it, and threw it back again on the table with an expression of disgust.

‘ You told me just now,’ he said, ‘ that I was married to the wife of another man. And there is the judge’s decision, releasing Miss Eyrecourt from her marriage to Mr. Winterfield. May I ask you to explain yourself?’

‘ Certainly. Let me first remind you that you owe religious allegiance to the principles which the Church has asserted, for centuries past, with all the authority of its divine institution. You admit that?’

‘ I admit it.’

‘ Now, listen ! In *our* Church, Romayne, marriage is even more than a religious

institution—it is a sacrament. We acknowledge no human laws which profane that sacrament. Take two examples of what I say. When the great Napoleon was at the height of his power, Pius the Seventh refused to acknowledge the validity of the Emperor's second marriage to Maria Louisa—while Josephine was living, divorced by the French Senate. Again, in the face of the Royal Marriage Act, the Church sanctioned the marriage of Mrs. Fitzherbert to George the Fourth, and still declares, in justice to her memory, that she was the King's lawful wife. In one word, marriage, to *be* marriage at all, must be the object of a purely religious celebration—and, this condition complied with, marriage is only to be dissolved by death. You remember what I told you of Mr. Winterfield? '

‘Yes. His first marriage took place before the registrar.’

‘In plain English, Romaine, Mr. Winterfield and the woman-rider in the circus pronounced a formula of words before a layman in an office. That is not only no marriage, it is a blasphemous profanation of a holy rite. Acts of Parliament which sanction such proceedings are acts of infidelity. The Church declares it, in defence of religion.’

‘I understand you,’ said Romaine. ‘Mr. Winterfield’s marriage at Brussels——’

‘Which the English law,’ Father Benwell interposed, ‘declares to be annulled by the marriage before the registrar, stands good, nevertheless, by the higher law of the Church. Mr. Winterfield is Miss Eyrecourt’s husband, as long as they both live. An ordained priest performed the ceremony in a conse-

crated building—and Protestant marriages, so celebrated, are marriages acknowledged by the Catholic Church. Under those circumstances, the ceremony which afterwards united you to Miss Eyrecourt—though neither you nor the clergyman were to blame—was a mere mockery. Need I say any more? Shall I leave you for awhile by yourself?’

‘No! I don’t know what I may think, I don’t know what I may do, if you leave me by myself.’

Father Benwell took a chair by Romaine’s side. ‘It has been my hard duty to grieve and humiliate you,’ he said. ‘Do you bear me no ill-will?’ He held out his hand.

Romaine took it—as an act of justice, if not as an act of gratitude.

‘Can I be of any use in advising you?’
Father Benwell asked.

‘Who can advise a man in my position?’
Romaine bitterly rejoined.

‘I can at least suggest that you should
take time to think over your position.’

‘Time? take time? You talk as if my
situation was endurable.’

‘Everything is endurable, Romaine!’

‘It may be so to you, Father Benwell.
Did you part with your humanity when you
put on the black robe of the priest?’

‘I parted, my son, with those weaknesses
of *our* humanity on which women practise.
You talk of your position. I will put it
before you at its worst.’

‘For what purpose?’

‘To show you exactly what you have
now to decide. Judged by the law of

England, Mrs. Romaine is your wife. Judged by the principles held sacred among the religious community to which you belong, she is not Mrs. Romaine—she is Mrs. Winterfield, living with you in adultery. If you regret your conversion——’

‘I don’t regret it, Father Benwell.’

‘If you renounce the holy aspirations which you have yourself acknowledged to me, return to your domestic life. But don’t ask us, while you are living with that lady, to respect you as a member of our communion.’

Romaine was silent. The more violent emotions aroused in him had, with time, subsided into calm. Tenderness, mercy, past affection found their opportunity, and pleaded with him. The priest’s bold language had missed the object at which it aimed. It had

revived in Romaine's memory the image of Stella in the days when he had first seen her. How gently her influence had wrought on him for good ; how tenderly, how truly, she had loved him. 'Give me some more wine !' he cried. 'I feel faint and giddy. Don't despise me, Father Benwell—I was once so fond of her !'

The priest poured out the wine. 'I feel for you,' he said. 'Indeed, indeed, I feel for you.'

It was not all a lie—there were grains of truth in that outburst of sympathy. Father Benwell was not wholly merciless. His far-seeing intellect, his daring duplicity, carried him straight on to his end in view. But, that end once gained—and, let it be remembered, not gained, in this case, wholly for himself—there were compassionate impulses

left in him which sometimes forced their way to the surface. A man of high intelligence—however he may misuse it, however unworthy he may be of it—has a gift from Heaven. When you want to see unredeemed wickedness, look for it in a fool.

‘Let me mention one circumstance,’ Father Benwell proceeded, ‘which may help to relieve you for the moment. In your present state of mind, you cannot return to The Retreat.’

‘Impossible!’

‘I have had a room prepared for you in this house. Here, free from any disturbing influence, you can shape the future course of your life. If you wish to communicate with your residence at Highgate——’

‘Don’t speak of it!’

Father Benwell sighed. ‘Ah, I under-

stand !' he said, sadly. ' The house associated with Mr. Winterfield's visit——'

Romayne again interrupted him—this time by gesture only. The hand that had made the sign clenched itself, when it rested afterwards on the table. His eyes looked downward, under frowning brows. At the name of Winterfield, remembrances that poisoned every better influence in him rose venomously in his mind. Once more he loathed the deceit that had been practised on him. Once more the detestable doubt of that asserted parting at the church door renewed its stealthy torment, and reasoned with him as if in words:—She has deceived you in one thing ; why not in another ?

' Can I see my lawyer here ?' he asked, suddenly.

‘My dear Romaine, you can see any one whom you like to invite.’

‘I shall not trouble you by staying very long, Father Benwell.’

‘Do nothing in a hurry, my son. Pray do nothing in a hurry!’

Romaine paid no attention to this entreaty. Shrinking from the momentous decision that awaited him, his mind instinctively took refuge in the prospect of change of scene. ‘I shall leave England!’ he said, impatiently.

‘Not alone,’ Father Benwell remonstrated.

‘Who will be my companion?’

‘I will,’ the priest answered.

Romaine’s weary eyes brightened faintly. In his desolate position, Father Benwell was the one friend on whom he could rely.

Penrose was far away; the Loring had helped to keep him deceived; Major Hynd had openly pitied and despised him as a victim to priestcraft.

‘Can you go with me at any time?’ he asked. ‘Have you no duties that keep you in England?’

‘My duties, Romaine, are already confided to other hands.’

‘Then you have foreseen this?’

‘I have thought it possible. Your journey may be long, or may be short—you shall not go away alone.’

‘I can think of nothing yet; my mind is a blank,’ Romaine confessed sadly. ‘I don’t know where I shall go.’

‘I know where you ought to go—and where you *will* go,’ said Father Benwell, emphatically.

‘Where?’

‘To Rome.’

Romayne understood the true meaning of that brief reply. A vague sense of dismay began to rise in his mind. While he was still tortured by doubt, it seemed as if Father Benwell had, by some inscrutable process of prevision, planned out his future beforehand. Had the priest foreseen events?

No—he had only foreseen possibilities, on the day when it first occurred to him that Romayne’s marriage was assailable, before the court of Romayne’s conscience, from the Roman Catholic point of view. By this means, the misfortune of Romayne’s marriage having preceded his conversion might be averted; and the one certain obstacle in the way of any change of purpose

on his part—the obstacle of the priesthood—might still be set up, by the voluntary separation of the husband from the wife. Thus far the Jesuit had modestly described himself to his reverend colleagues, as regarding his position towards Romaine in a new light. His next letter might boldly explain to them what he had really meant. The triumph was won. Not a word more passed between his guest and himself that morning.

Before post-time, on the same day, Father Benwell wrote his last report to the Secretary of the Society of Jesus, in these lines:—

‘ Romaine is free from the domestic ties that bound him. He bequeaths Vange Abbey as a legacy to the Church ; and he acknowledges a vocation for the priesthood. Expect us at Rome in a fortnight’s time.’

AFTER THE STORY.

EXTRACTS FROM

BERNARD WINTERFIELD'S DIARY.

I.

WINTERFIELD DEFENDS HIMSELF.

Beaupark House. June 17th, 18—.

You and I, Cousin Beeminster, seldom meet. But I occasionally hear of you, from friends acquainted with both of us.

I have heard of you last at Sir Philip's rent-day dinner, a week since. My name happened to be mentioned by one of the gentlemen present, a guest like yourself. You took up the subject of your own free will, and spoke of me in these terms :

‘I am sorry to say it of the existing head of the family—but Bernard is really unfit for the position which he holds. He

has, to say the least of it, compromised himself and his relatives on more than one occasion. He began as a young man by marrying a circus-rider. He got into some other scrape, after that, which he has contrived to keep a secret from us. We only know how disgraceful it must have been by the results—he was a voluntary exile from England for more than a year. And now, to complete the list, he has mixed himself up in that miserable and revolting business of Lewis Romaine and his wife.’

If any other person had spoken of me in this manner, I should have set him down as a mischievous idiot—to be kicked perhaps, but not to be noticed in any other way.

With you, the case is different. If I die without male offspring, the Beaupark estate goes to you, as next heir.

I don't choose to let a man in this position slander me, and those dear to me, without promptly contradicting him. The name I bear is precious to me, in memory of my father. Your unanswered allusion to my relations with 'Lewis Romaine and his wife,' coming from a member of the family, will be received as truth. Rather than let this be, I reveal to you, without reserve, some of the saddest passages of my life. I have nothing to be ashamed of—and, if I have hitherto kept certain events in the dark, it has been for the sake of others, not for my own sake. I know better now. A woman's reputation—if she is a good woman—is not easily compromised by telling the truth. The person of whom I am thinking, when I write this, knows what I am going to do—and approves of it.

You will receive, with these lines, the most perfectly candid statement that I can furnish, being extracts cut out of my own private Diary. They are accompanied (where plain necessity seems to call for it) by the written evidence of other persons.

There has never been much sympathy between us. But you have been brought up like a gentleman—and, when you have read my narrative, I expect that you will do justice to me, and to others—even though you think we acted indiscreetly under trying and critical circumstances.

B. W.

II.

WINTERFIELD MAKES EXTRACTS.

First Extract.

April 11th, 1859.—Mrs. Eyrecourt and her daughter have left Beaupark to-day for London. Have I really made any impression on the heart of the beautiful Stella? In my miserable position—ignorant whether I am free or not—I have shrunk from formally acknowledging that I love her.

12th.—I am becoming superstitious! In the Obituary of to-day's 'Times' the death is recorded of that unhappy woman whom I was mad enough to marry. After hearing nothing of her for seven years—I am free! Surely this is a good omen? Shall I follow

the Eyrecourts to London, and declare myself? I have not confidence enough in my own power of attraction to run the risk. Better to write first, in strictest confidence, to Mrs. Eyrecourt.

14th.—An enchanting answer from my angel's mother, written in great haste. They are on the point of leaving for Paris. Stella is restless and dissatisfied; she wants change of scene; and Mrs. Eyrecourt adds, in so many words:—‘It is you who have upset her; why did you not speak while we were at Beaupark?’ I am to hear again from Paris. Good old Father Newbliss said all along that she was fond of me, and wondered, like Mrs. Eyrecourt, why I failed to declare myself. How could I tell them of the hideous fetters which bound me in those days?

18th, *Paris*. — She has accepted me! Words are useless to express my happiness.

19th.—A letter from my lawyer, full of professional subtleties and delays. I have no patience to enumerate them. We move to Belgium to-morrow. Not on our way back to England—Stella is so little desirous of leaving the Continent that we are likely to be married abroad. But she is weary of the perpetual gaiety and glitter of Paris, and wants to see the old Belgian cities. Her mother leaves Paris with regret. The liveliest woman of her age that I ever met with.

Brussels, May 7.—My blessing on the old Belgian cities. Mrs. Eyrecourt is so eager to get away from them that she backs me in hurrying the marriage, and even consents, sorely against the grain, to

let the wedding be celebrated at Brussels in a private and unpretending way. She has only stipulated that Lord and Lady Loring (old friends) shall be present. They are to arrive to-morrow, and two days afterwards we are to be married.

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(An enclosure is inserted in this place. It consists of the death-bed confession of Mr. Winterfield's wife, and of the explanatory letter written by the rector of Belhaven. The circumstances related in these documents, already known to the reader, are left to speak for themselves, and the Extracts from the Diary are then continued.)

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Bingen, on the Rhine, May 19.—Letters from Devonshire at last, which relieve my

wretchedness in some small degree. The frightful misfortune at Brussels will at least be kept secret, so far as I am concerned. Beaupark House is shut up, and the servants are dismissed, 'in consequence of my residence abroad.' To Father Newbliss I have privately written. Not daring to tell him the truth, I leave him to infer that my marriage-engagement has been broken off; he writes back a kind and comforting letter. Time will, I suppose, help me to bear my sad lot. Perhaps a day may come when Stella and her friends will know how cruelly they have wronged me.

London, November 18, 1860.—The old wound has been opened again. I met her accidentally in a picture gallery. She turned

deadly pale, and left the place. Oh, Stella! Stella!

London, August 12, 1861.—Another meeting with her. And another shock to endure, which I might not have suffered if I had been a reader of the marriage announcements in the newspapers. Like other men, I am in the habit of leaving the marriage announcements to the women.

I went to visit an agreeable new acquaintance, Mr. Romaine. His wife drove up to the house while I was looking out of window. I recognised Stella! After two years, she has made use of the freedom which the law has given to her. I must not complain of that, or of her treating me like a stranger, when her husband innocently introduced us. But, when we were

afterwards left together for a few minutes—no! I cannot write down the merciless words she said to me. Why am I fool enough to be as fond of her as ever?

Beaupark, November 16.—Stella's married life is not likely to be a happy one. To-day's newspaper announces the conversion of her husband to the Roman Catholic Faith. I can honestly say I am sorry for her, knowing how she has suffered, among her own relatives, by these conversions. But I so hate *him*, that this proof of his weakness is a downright consolation to me.

Beaupark, January 27, 1862.—A letter from Stella, so startling and deplorable that I cannot remain away from her after reading it. Her husband has deliberately

deserted her. He has gone to Rome, to serve his term of probation for the priesthood. I travel to London by to-day's train.

London, January 27.—Short as it is, I looked at Stella's letter again and again on the journey. The tone of the closing sentences is still studiously cold. After informing me that she is staying with her mother in London, she concludes her letter in these terms :—

‘Be under no fear that the burden of my troubles will be laid on your shoulders. Since the fatal day when we met at Ten Acres, you have shown forbearance and compassion towards me. I don't stop to inquire if you are sincere—it rests with you to prove that. But I have some questions to ask, which no person but you can answer.

For the rest, my friendless position will perhaps plead with you not to misunderstand me. May I write again?’

Inveterate distrust in every sentence! If any other woman had treated me in this way, I should have put her letter into the fire, and should not have stirred from my comfortable house.

January 29.—A day missed out of my Diary. The events of yesterday unnerved me for the time.

Arriving at Derwent’s Hotel on the evening of the 27th, I sent a line to Stella by messenger, to ask when she could receive me.

It is strange how the merest trifles seem to touch women! Her note in reply contains the first expression of friendly

feeling towards me which has escaped her since we parted at Brussels. And this expression proceeds from her ungovernable surprise and gratitude, at my taking the trouble to travel from Devonshire to London on her account!

For the rest, she proposed to call on me at the hotel the next morning. She and her mother, it appeared, differed in opinion on the subject of Mr. Romaine's behaviour to her; and she wished to see me, in the first instance, unrestrained by Mrs. Eyre-court's interference.

There was little sleep for me that night. I passed most of the time in smoking and walking up and down the room. My one relief was afforded by Traveller—he begged so hard to go to London with me, I could not resist him. The dog always sleeps in

my room. His surprise at my extraordinary restlessness (ending in downright anxiety and alarm) was expressed in his eyes, and in his little whinings and cries, quite as intelligibly as if he had put his meaning into words. Who first called a dog a dumb creature? It must have been a man, I think—and a thoroughly unlovable man, too, from a dog's point of view.

Soon after ten, on the morning of the 28th, she entered my sitting-room.

In her personal appearance, I saw a change for the worse; produced, I suppose, by the troubles that have tried her sorely, poor thing. There was a sad loss of delicacy in her features, and of purity in her complexion. Even her dress—I should certainly not have noticed it in any other woman—seemed to be loose and slovenly.

In the agitation of the moment, I forgot the long estrangement between us; I half lifted my hand to take hers, and checked myself. Was I mistaken in supposing that she yielded to the same impulse, and resisted it as I did? She concealed her embarrassment, if she felt any, by patting the dog.

‘I am ashamed that you should have taken the journey to London in this wintry weather——’ she began.

It was impossible, in her situation, to let her assume this commonplace tone with me. ‘I sincerely feel for you,’ I said, ‘and sincerely wish to help you, if I can.’

She looked at me for the first time. Did she believe me? or did she still doubt? Before I could decide, she took a letter from her pocket, opened it, and handed it to me.

‘Women often exaggerate their troubles,’ she said. ‘It is perhaps an unfair trial of your patience—but I should like you to satisfy yourself that I have not made the worst of my situation. That letter will place it before you in Mr. Romaine’s own words. Read it, except where the page is turned down.’

It was her husband’s letter of farewell.

The language was scrupulously delicate and considerate. But to my mind it entirely failed to disguise the fanatical cruelty of the man’s resolution, addressed to his wife. In substance, it came to this:—

‘He had discovered the marriage at Brussels, which she had deliberately concealed from him when he took her for his wife. She had afterwards persisted in that concealment, under circumstances which

made it impossible that he could ever trust her again.' (This no doubt referred to her ill-advised reception of me, as a total stranger, at Ten Acres Lodge.) 'In the miserable break-up of his domestic life, the church to which he now belonged offered him, not only her divine consolation, but the honour, above all earthly distinctions, of serving the cause of religion in the sacred ranks of the priesthood. Before his departure for Rome he bade her a last farewell in this world, and forgave her the injuries that she had inflicted on him. For her sake he asked leave to say some few words more. In the first place, he desired to do her every justice, in a worldly sense. Ten Acres Lodge was offered to her as a free gift for her lifetime, with a sufficient income for all her wants. In

the second place, he was anxious that she should not misinterpret his motives. Whatever his opinion of her conduct might be, he did not rely on it as affording his only justification for leaving her. Setting personal feeling aside, he felt religious scruples (connected with his marriage) which left him no other alternative than the separation on which he had resolved. He would briefly explain those scruples, and mention his authority for entertaining them, before he closed his letter.'

There the page was turned down, and the explanation was concealed from me.

A faint colour stole over her face as I handed the letter back to her.

'It is needless for you to read the end,' she said. 'You know, under his own hand, that he has left me; and (if such a thing

pleads with you in his favour), you also know that he is liberal in providing for his deserted wife.'

I attempted to speak. She saw in my face how I despised him, and stopped me.

'Whatever you may think of his conduct,' she continued, 'I beg that you will not speak of it to me. May I ask your opinion (now you have read his letter) on another matter, in which my own conduct is concerned? In former days ——'

She paused, poor soul, in evident confusion and distress.

'Why speak of those days?' I ventured to say.

'I must speak of them. In former days, I think you were told that my father's will provided for my mother and for me. You know that we have enough to live on?'

I had heard of it, at the time of our betrothal — when the marriage-settlement was in preparation. The mother and daughter had each a little income of a few hundreds a year. The exact amount had escaped my memory.

After answering her to this effect, I waited to hear more.

She suddenly became silent; the most painful embarrassment showed itself in her face and manner. ‘Never mind the rest,’ she said, mastering her confusion after an interval. ‘I have had some hard trials to bear; I forget things ——’ she made an effort to finish the sentence, and gave it up, and called to the dog to come to her. The tears were in her eyes, and that was the way she took to hide them from me.

In general, I am not quick at reading

the minds of others—but I thought I understood Stella. Now that we were face to face, the impulse to trust me had, for the moment, got the better of her caution and her pride ; she was half ashamed of it, half inclined to follow it. I hesitated no longer. The time for which I had waited—the time to prove, without any indelicacy on my side, that I had never been unworthy of her—had surely come at last.

‘Do you remember my reply to your letter about Father Benwell?’ I asked.

‘Yes—every word of it.’

‘I promised, if you ever had need of me, to prove that I had never been unworthy of your confidence. In your present situation, I can honourably keep my promise. Shall I wait till you are calmer? or shall I go on at once?’

‘At once!’

‘When your mother and your friends took you from me,’ I resumed, ‘if you had shown any hesitation——’

She shuddered. The image of my unhappy wife, vindictively confronting us on the church steps, seemed to be recalled to her memory. ‘Don’t go back to it!’ she cried. ‘Spare me, I entreat you.’

I opened the writing-case in which I keep the papers sent to me by the Rector of Belhaven, and placed them on the table by which she was sitting. The more plainly and briefly I spoke now, the better I thought it might be for both of us.

‘Since we parted at Brussels,’ I said, ‘my wife has died. Here is a copy of the medical certificate of her death.’

Stella refused to look at it. ‘I don’t

understand such things,' she answered faintly.

‘What is this?’

She took up my wife's death-bed confession.

‘Read it,’ I said.

She looked frightened. ‘What will it tell me?’ she asked.

‘It will tell you, Stella, that false appearances once led you into wronging an innocent man.’

Having said this, I walked away to a window behind her, at the farther end of the room, so that she might not see me while she read.

After a time — how much longer it seemed to be than it really was! — I heard her move. As I turned from the window, she ran to me, and fell on her knees at my feet. I tried to raise her; I entreated her

to believe that she was forgiven. She seized my hands, and held them over her face—they were wet with her tears. ‘I am ashamed to look at you,’ she said. ‘Oh, Bernard, what a wretch I have been!’

I never was so distressed in my life. I don’t know what I should have said, what I should have done, if my dear old dog had not helped me out of it. He, too, ran up to me, with the loving jealousy of his race, and tried to lick my hands, still fast in Stella’s hold. His paws were on her shoulder; he attempted to push himself between us. I think I successfully assumed a tranquillity which I was far from really feeling. ‘Come, come!’ I said, ‘you mustn’t make Traveller jealous.’ She let me raise her. Ah, if she could have kissed *me*—but that was not to be done; she kissed the dog’s

head, and then she spoke to me. I shall not set down what she said in these pages. While I live, there is no fear of my forgetting those words.

I led her back to her chair. The letter addressed to me by the Rector of Belhaven still lay on the table, unread. It was of some importance to Stella's complete enlightenment, as containing evidence that the confession was genuine. But I hesitated, for her sake, to speak of it just yet.

'Now you know that you have a friend to help and advise you——' I began.

'No,' she interposed; 'more than a friend; say a brother.'

I said it. 'You had something to ask of me,' I resumed, 'and you never put the question.'

She understood me.

‘I meant to tell you,’ she said, ‘that I had written a letter of refusal to Mr. Romaine’s lawyers. I have left Ten Acres, never to return; and I refuse to accept a farthing of Mr. Romaine’s money. My mother—though she knows that we have enough to live on—tells me I have acted with inexcusable pride and folly. I wanted to ask if you blame me, Bernard, as she does?’

I dare say I was inexcusably proud and foolish, too. It was the second time she had called me by my Christian name since the happy bygone time, never to come again. Under whatever influence I acted, I respected and admired her for that refusal, and I owned it in so many words. This little encouragement seemed to relieve her. She

was so much calmer that I ventured to speak of the Rector's letter.

She wouldn't hear of it. 'Oh, Bernard, have I not learnt to trust you yet? Put away those papers. There is only one thing I want to know. Who gave them to you? The Rector?'

'No.'

'How did they reach you, then?'

'Through Father Benwell.'

She started at that name like a woman electrified.

'I knew it!' she cried. 'It is the priest who has wrecked my married life—and he got his information from those letters, before he put them into your hands.' She waited awhile, and recovered herself. 'That was the first of the questions I wanted to put

to you,' she said. 'I am answered. I ask no more.'

She was surely wrong about Father Benwell? I tried to show her why.

I told her that my reverend friend had put the letters into my hand, with the seal which protected them unbroken. She laughed disdainfully. Did I know him so little as to doubt for a moment that he could break a seal and replace it again? This view was entirely new to me; I was startled, but not convinced. I never desert my friends—even when they are friends of no very long standing—and I still tried to defend Father Benwell. The only result was to make her alter her intention of asking me no more questions. I innocently roused in her a new curiosity. She was eager to know how I had first become acquainted

with the priest, and how he had contrived to possess himself of papers which were intended for my reading only.

There was but one way of answering her.

It was far from easy to a man like myself, unaccustomed to state circumstances in their proper order—but I had no other choice than to reply, by telling the long story of the theft and discovery of the Rector's papers. So far as Father Benwell was concerned, the narrative only confirmed her suspicions. For the rest, the circumstances which most interested her were the circumstances associated with the French boy.

‘Anything connected with that poor creature,’ she said, ‘has a dreadful interest for me now.’

‘Did you know him?’ I asked, with some surprise.

‘I knew him and his mother—you shall hear how, at another time. I suppose I felt a presentiment that the boy would have some evil influence over me. At any rate, when I accidentally touched him, I trembled as if I had touched a serpent. You will think me superstitious—but, after what you have said, it is certainly true that he has been the indirect cause of the misfortune that has fallen on me. How came he to steal the papers? Did you ask the Rector, when you went to Belhaven?’

‘I asked the Rector nothing. But he thought it his duty to tell me all that he knew of the theft.’

She drew her chair nearer to me. ‘Let me hear every word of it!’ she pleaded eagerly.

I felt some reluctance to comply with the request.

‘Is it not fit for me to hear?’ she asked.

This forced me to be plain with her. ‘If I repeat what the Rector told me,’ I said, ‘I must speak of my wife.’

She took my hand. ‘You have pitied and forgiven her,’ she answered. ‘Speak of her, Bernard—and don’t, for God’s sake, think that my heart is harder than yours.’

I kissed the hand that she had given to me—even her ‘brother’ might do that!

‘It began,’ I said, ‘in the grateful attachment which the boy felt for my wife. He refused to leave her bedside on the day when she dictated her confession to the Rector. As he was entirely ignorant

of the English language, there seemed to be no objection to letting him have his own way. He became inquisitive as the writing went on. His questions annoyed the Rector—and, as the easiest way of satisfying his curiosity, my wife told him that she was making her will. He knew just enough, from what he had heard at various times, to associate making a will with gifts of money—and the pretended explanation silenced and satisfied him.'

'Did the Rector understand it?' Stella asked.

'Yes. Like many other Englishmen in his position, although he was not ready at speaking French, he could read the language, and could fairly well understand it, when it was spoken. After my wife's death, he kindly placed the boy, for a

few days, under the care of his housekeeper. Her early life had been passed in the island of Martinique, and she was able to communicate with the friendless foreigner in his own language. When he disappeared, she was the only person who could throw any light on his motive for stealing the papers. On the day when he entered the house, she caught him, peeping through the key-hole of the study door. He must have seen where the confession was placed, and the colour of the old-fashioned blue paper, on which it was written, would help him to identify it. The next morning, during the Rector's absence, he brought the manuscript to the housekeeper, and asked her to translate it into French, so that he might know how much money

was left to him in 'the will.' She severely reproved him, made him replace the paper in the desk from which he had taken it, and threatened to tell the Rector if his misconduct was repeated. He promised amendment, and the good-natured woman believed him. On that evening the papers were sealed, and locked up. In the morning the lock was found broken, and the papers and the boy were both missing together.'

'Do you think he showed the confession to any other person?' Stella asked. 'I happen to know that he concealed it from his mother.'

'After the housekeeper's reproof,' I replied, 'he would be cunning enough, in my opinion, not to run the risk of showing it to strangers. It is far more likely that

he thought he might learn English enough to read it himself.'

There the subject dropped. We were silent for awhile. She was thinking, and I was looking at her. On a sudden, she raised her head. Her eyes rested on me gravely.

'It is very strange!' she said.

'What is strange?'

'I have been thinking of the Lorings. They encouraged me to doubt you. They advised me to be silent about what happened at Brussels. And they too are concerned in my husband's desertion of me. He first met Father Benwell at their house.' Her head drooped again; her next words were murmured to herself. 'I am still a young woman,' she said. 'Oh, God, what is my future to be?'

This morbid way of thinking distressed me. I reminded her that she had dear and devoted friends.

‘Not one,’ she answered, ‘but you.’

‘Have you not seen Lady Loring?’ I asked.

‘She and her husband have written most kindly, inviting me to make their house my home. I have no right to blame them—they meant well. But after what has happened, I can’t go back to them.’

‘I am sorry to hear it,’ I said.

‘Are you thinking of the Lorings?’ she asked.

‘I don’t even know the Lorings. I can think of nobody but you.’

I was still looking at her—and I am afraid my eyes said more than my words.

If she had doubted it before, she must have now known that I was as fond of her as ever. She looked distressed rather than confused. I made an awkward attempt to set myself right.

‘Surely your brother may speak plainly,’ I pleaded.

She agreed to this. But nevertheless she rose to go—with a friendly word, intended (as I hoped) to show me that I had got my pardon for that time. ‘Will you come and see us to-morrow?’ she said. ‘Can you forgive my mother as generously as you have forgiven me? I will take care, Bernard, that she does you justice at last.’

She held out her hand to take leave. How could I reply? If I had been a resolute man, I might have remembered

that it would be best for me not to see too much of her. But I am a poor weak creature—I accepted her invitation for the next day.

January 30.—I have just returned from my visit.

My thoughts are in a state of indescribable conflict and confusion—and her mother is the cause of it. I wish I had not gone to the house. Am I a bad man, I wonder? and have I only found it out now?

Mrs. Eyrecourt was alone in the drawing-room when I went in. Judging by the easy manner in which she got up to receive me, the misfortune that has befallen her daughter seemed to have produced no sobering change in this frivolous woman.

‘My dear Winterfield,’ she began, ‘I have behaved infamously. I won’t say that appearances were against you at Brussels—I will only say I ought not to have trusted to appearances. You are the injured person; please forgive me. Shall we go on with the subject? or shall we shake hands, and say no more about it?’

I shook hands of course. Mrs. Eyre-court perceived that I was looking for Stella.

‘Sit down,’ she said; ‘and be good enough to put up with no more attractive society than mine. Unless I set things straight, my good friend, you and my daughter—oh, with the best intentions!—will drift into a false position. You won’t see Stella to-day. Quite impossible—and I will tell you why. I am the

worldly old mother ; I don't mind what I say. My innocent daughter would die before she would confess what I am going to tell you. Can I offer you anything? Have you had lunch?'

I begged her to continue. She perplexed—I am not sure that she did not even alarm me.

'Very well,' she proceeded. 'You may be surprised to hear it—but I don't mean to allow things to go on in this way. My contemptible son-in-law shall return to his wife.'

This startled me, and I suppose I showed it.

'Wait a little,' said Mrs. Eyrecourt. 'There is nothing to be alarmed about. Romaine is a weak fool ; and Father Benwell's greedy hands are (of course) in both

his pockets. But he has, unless I am entirely mistaken, some small sense of shame, and some little human feeling still left. After the manner in which he has behaved, these are the merest possibilities, you will say. Very likely. I have boldly appealed to those possibilities, nevertheless. He has already gone away to Rome; and I need hardly add—Father Benwell would take good care of that—he has left us no address. It doesn't in the least matter. One of the advantages of being so much in Society as I am is that I have nice acquaintances everywhere, always ready to oblige me, provided I don't borrow money of them. I have written to Romaine, under cover to one of my friends living in Rome. Wherever he may be, there my letter will find him.'

So far, I listened quietly enough, naturally supposing that Mrs. Eyrecourt trusted to her own arguments and persuasions. I confess it, even to myself, with shame. It was a relief to me to feel that the chances (with such a fanatic as Romaine) were a hundred to one against her.

This unworthy way of thinking was instantly checked by Mrs. Eyrecourt's next words.

‘Don't suppose that I am foolish enough to attempt to reason with him,’ she went on. ‘My letter begins and ends on the first page. His wife has a claim on him, which no newly-married man can resist. Let me do him justice. He knew nothing of it before he went away. My letter—my daughter has no suspicion that I have

written it—tells him plainly what the claim is.’

She paused. Her eyes softened, her voice sank low—she became quite unlike the Mrs. Eyrecourt whom I knew.

‘In a few months more, Winterfield,’ she said, ‘my poor Stella will be a mother. My letter calls Romaine back to his wife—*and his child.*

Mrs. Eyrecourt paused, evidently expecting me to offer an opinion of some sort. For the moment I was really unable to speak. Stella’s mother never had a very high opinion of my abilities. She now appeared to consider me the stupidest person in the circle of her acquaintance.

‘Are you a little deaf, Winterfield?’ she asked.

‘Not that I know of.’

‘Do you understand me?’

‘Oh, yes.’

‘Then why can’t you say something? I want a man’s opinion of our prospects. Good gracious, how you fidget! Put yourself in Romaine’s place, and tell me this. If *you* had left Stella——’

‘I should never have left her, Mrs. Eyrecourt.’

‘Be quiet. You don’t know what you would have done. I insist on your supposing yourself to be a weak, superstitious, conceited, fanatical fool. You understand? Now, tell me, then. Could you keep away from your wife, when you were called back to her in the name of your first-born child? Could you resist that?’

‘Most assuredly not!’

I contrived to reply with an appearance

of tranquillity. It was not very easy to speak with composure. Envious, selfish, contemptible—no language is too strong to describe the turn my thoughts now took. I never hated any human being as I hated Romaine at that moment. ‘Damn him, he will come back!’ There was my inmost feeling expressed in words.

In the meantime, Mrs. Eyrecourt was satisfied. She dashed at the next subject as fluent and as confident as ever.

‘Now, Winterfield, it is surely plain to your mind that you must not see Stella again—except when I am present to tie the tongue of scandal. My daughter’s conduct must not allow her husband—if you only knew how I detest that man!—must not, I say, allow her husband the slightest excuse for keeping away from her. If we

give that odious old Jesuit the chance, he will make a priest of Romaine before we know where we are. The audacity of these Papists is really beyond belief. You remember how they made Bishops and Archbishops here, in flat defiance of our laws? Father Benwell follows that example, and sets our other laws at defiance—I mean our marriage laws. I am so indignant I can't express myself as clearly as usual. Did Stella tell you that he actually shook Romaine's belief in his own marriage? Ah, I understand—she kept that to herself, poor dear, and with good reason too.

I thought of the turned-down page in the letter. Mrs. Eyrecourt readily revealed what her daughter's delicacy had forbidden me to read—including the monstrous assumption which connected my marriage

before the registrar with her son-in-law's scruples.

‘Yes,’ she proceeded, ‘these Catholics are all alike. My daughter—I don’t mean my sweet Stella; I mean the unnatural creature in the nunnery—sets herself above her own mother. Did I ever tell you she was impudent enough to say she would pray for me? Father Benwell and the Papal Aggression over again! Now tell me, Winterfield, don’t you think—taking the circumstances into consideration—that you will act like a thoroughly sensible man if you go back to Devonshire while we are in our present situation? What with footwarmers in the carriage, and newspapers and magazines to amuse you, it isn’t such a very long journey. And then Beaupark—dear Beaupark—is such a remarkably com-

fortable house in the winter ; and you, you enviable creature, are such a popular man in the neighbourhood. Oh, go back ! go back !’

I got up and took my hat. She patted me on the shoulder. I could have throttled her at that moment. And yet she was right.

‘ You will make my excuses to Stella ? ’ I said.

‘ You dear good fellow, I will do more than make your excuses ; I will sing your praises—as the poet says.’ In her ungovernable exultation at having got rid of me, she burst into extravagant language. ‘ I feel like a mother to you,’ she went on, as we shook hands at parting. ‘ I declare I could almost let you kiss me.’

There was not a single kissable place

about Mrs. Eyrecourt, unpainted, undyed, or unpowdered. I resisted temptation, and opened the door. There was still one last request that I could not help making.

‘Will you let me know,’ I said, ‘when you hear from Rome?’

‘With the greatest pleasure,’ Mrs. Eyrecourt answered briskly. ‘Good-bye, you best of friends—good-bye.’

I write these lines while the servant is packing my portmanteau. Traveller knows what that means. My dog is glad, at any rate, to get away from London. I think I shall hire a yacht, and try what a voyage round the world will do for me. I wish to God I had never seen Stella!

Second Extract.

Beaupark: February 10.—News at last from Mrs. Eyrecourt.

Romayne has not even read the letter that she addressed to him—it has actually been returned to her by Father Benwell. Mrs. Eyrecourt writes, naturally enough, in a state of fury. Her one consolation, under this insulting treatment, is that her daughter knows nothing of the circumstances. She warns me (quite needlessly) to keep the secret—and sends me a copy of Father Benwell's letter:—

‘Dear Madam,—Mr. Romayne can read nothing that diverts his attention from his preparation for the priesthood, or that recalls past associations with errors which he

has renounced for ever. When a letter reaches him, it is his wise custom to look at the signature first. He has handed your letter to me, *unread*—with a request that I will return it to you. In his presence, I instantly sealed it up. Neither he, nor I, know, or wish to know, on what subject you have addressed him. We respectfully advise you not to write again.’

This is really too bad; but it has one advantage, so far as I am concerned. It sets my own unworthy doubts and jealousies before me in a baser light than ever. How honestly I defended Father Benwell! and how completely he has deceived me! I wonder whether I shall live long enough to see the Jesuit caught in one of his own traps?

11th.—I was disappointed at not hearing

from Stella, yesterday. This morning has made amends; it has brought me a letter from her.

She is not well; and her mother's conduct sadly perplexes her. At one time, Mrs. Eyrecourt's sense of injury urges her to indulge in violent measures—she is eager to place her deserted daughter under the protection of the law; to insist on a restitution of conjugal rights or on a judicial separation. At another time she sinks into a state of abject depression; declares that it is impossible for her, in Stella's deplorable situation, to face Society; and recommends immediate retirement to some place on the Continent in which they can live cheaply. This latter suggestion Stella is not only ready, but eager, to adopt. She proves it by asking for my advice, in a

postscript ; no doubt remembering the happy days when I courted her in Paris, and the many foreign friends of mine who called at our hotel.

The postscript gave me the excuse that I wanted. I knew perfectly well that it would be better for me not to see her—and I went to London, for the sole purpose of seeing her, by the first train.

London, February 12.—I found mother and daughter together in the drawing-room. It was one of Mrs. Eyrecourt's days of depression. Her little twinkling eyes tried to cast on me a look of tragic reproach ; she shook her dyed head, and said, ' Oh, Winterfield, I didn't think you would have done this ! Stella, fetch me my smelling-bottle.'

But Stella refused to take the hint. She almost brought the tears into my eyes, she received me so kindly. If her mother had not been in the room—but her mother *was* in the room; I had no other choice than to enter on my business, as if I had been the family lawyer.

Mrs. Eyrecourt began by reproving Stella for asking my advice, and then assured me that she had no intention of leaving London. ‘How am I to get rid of my house?’ she asked, irritably enough. I knew that ‘her house’ (as she called it) was the furnished upper part of a house belonging to another person, and that she could leave it at a short notice. But I said nothing. I addressed myself to Stella.

‘I have been thinking of two or three places which you might like,’ I went on.

‘The nearest place belongs to an old French gentleman and his wife. They have no children, and they don’t let lodgings; but I believe they would be glad to receive friends of mine, if their spare rooms are not already occupied. They live at St. Germain—close to Paris.’

I looked at Mrs. Eyrecourt as I said those last words—I was as sly as Father Benwell himself. Paris justified my confidence; the temptation was too much for her. She not only gave way, but actually mentioned the amount of rent which she could afford to pay. Stella whispered her thanks to me as I went out. ‘My name is not mentioned, but my misfortune is alluded to in the newspapers,’ she said. ‘Well-meaning friends are calling and condoling with me already. I shall die, if

you don't help me to get away among strangers !'

I start for Paris, by the mail train, to-night.

Paris, February 13.—It is evening. I have just returned from St. Germain. Everything is settled—with more slyness on my part. I begin to think I am a born Jesuit; there must have been some detestable sympathy between Father Benwell and me.

My good friends, Monsieur and Madame Villeray, will be only too glad to receive English ladies, known to me for many years. The spacious and handsome first floor of their house (inherited from once wealthy ancestors by Madame Villeray) can be got ready to receive Mrs. Eyrecourt and

her daughter in a week's time. Our one difficulty related to the question of money. Monsieur Villeray, living on a Government pension, was modestly unwilling to ask terms; and I was too absolutely ignorant of the subject to be of the slightest assistance to him. It ended in our appealing to a house-agent at St. Germain. His estimate appeared to me to be quite reasonable. But it exceeded the pecuniary limit mentioned by Mrs. Eyrecourt. I had known the Villerays long enough to be in no danger of offending them by proposing a secret arrangement which permitted me to pay the difference. So that difficulty was got over in due course of time.

We went into the large garden at the back of the house, and there I committed another act of duplicity.

In a nice sheltered corner I discovered one of those essentially French buildings called a ‘pavilion,’ a delightful little toy house of three rooms. Another private arrangement made me the tenant of this place. Madame Villeray smiled. ‘I bet you,’ she said to me in her very best English, ‘one of these ladies is in her fascinating first youth.’ The good lady little knows what a hopeless love affair mine is. I must see Stella sometimes—I ask, and hope for, no more. Never have I felt how lonely my life is, as I feel it now.

Third Extract.

London, March 1. — Stella and her mother have set forth on their journey to St. Germain this morning, without allow-

ing me, as I had hoped and planned, to be their escort.

Mrs. Eyrecourt set up the old objection of the claims of propriety. If that were the only obstacle in my way, I should have set it aside by following them to France. Where is the impropriety of my seeing Stella, as her friend and brother—especially when I don't live in the same house with her, and when she has her mother, on one side, and Madame Villeray, on the other, to take care of her?

No! the influence that keeps me away from St. Germain is the influence of Stella herself.

‘I will write to you often,’ she said; ‘but I beg you, for my sake, not to accompany us to France.’ Her look and tone reduced me to obedience. Stupid as I am,

I think (after what passed between me and her mother) I can guess what she meant.

‘Am I never to see you again?’ I asked.

‘Do you think I am hard and ungrateful?’ she answered. ‘Do you doubt that I shall be glad, more than glad, to see you, when——?’ She turned away from me and said no more.

It was time to take leave. We were under her mother’s superintendence; we shook hands—and that was all.

Matilda (Mrs. Eyrecourt’s maid) followed me downstairs to open the door. I suppose I looked, as I felt, wretchedly enough. The good creature tried to cheer me. ‘Don’t be anxious about them,’ she said; ‘I am used to travelling, sir — and I’ll take care of them.’ She is a woman to be thoroughly depended on, a faithful and attached ser-

vant. I made her a little present at parting, and I asked her if she would write to me from time to time.

Some people might consider this to be rather an undignified proceeding on my part. I can only say it came naturally to me. I am not a dignified man ; and, when a person means kindly towards me, I don't ask myself whether that person is higher or lower, richer or poorer, than I am. We are, to my mind, on the same level when the same sympathy unites us. Matilda was sufficiently acquainted with all that had passed to foresee, as I did, that there would be certain reservations in Stella's letters to me. ' You shall have the whole truth from Me, sir, don't doubt it,' she whispered. I believed her. When my heart is sore, give me a woman for my friend. Whether she is

lady or lady's-maid, she is equally precious to me.

Cowes, March 2.—I am in treaty with an agent for the hire of a yacht.

I must do something, and go somewhere. Returning to Beaupark is out of the question. People with tranquil minds can find pleasure in the society of their country neighbours. I am a miserable creature, with a mind in a state of incessant disturbance. Excellent fathers of families talking politics to me ; exemplary mothers of families offering me matrimonial opportunities with their daughters—that is what society means, if I go back to Devonshire. No. I will go for a cruise in the Mediterranean ; and I will take one friend with me whose company I never weary of—my dog.

The vessel is discovered—a fine schooner of three hundred tons, just returned from a cruise to Madeira. The sailing-master and crew only ask for a few days on shore. In that time the surveyor will have examined the vessel, and the stores will be on board.

March 3.—I have written to Stella, with a list of addresses at which letters will reach me; and I have sent another list to my faithful ally the maid. When we leave Gibraltar, our course will be to Naples—thence to Civita Vecchia, Leghorn, Genoa, Marseilles. From any of those places, I am within easy travelling distance of St. Germain.

March 7. At Sea.—It is half-past six in the evening. We have just passed the

Eddystone Lighthouse, with the wind abeam.
The log registers ten knots an hour.

Fourth Extract.

Naples, May 10.—The fair promise at the beginning of my voyage has not been fulfilled. Owing to contrary winds, storms, and delay at Cadiz in repairing damages, we have only arrived at Naples this evening. Under trying circumstances of all sorts, the yacht has behaved admirably. A stouter and finer sea-boat never was built.

We are too late to find the post office open. I shall send ashore for letters the first thing to-morrow morning. My next movements will depend entirely on the news I get from St. Germain. If I remain for any length of time in these regions,

I shall give my crew the holiday they have well earned at Civita Vecchia. I am never weary of Rome—but I always did, and always shall, dislike Naples.

May 11.—My plans are completely changed. I am annoyed and angry; the further I get away from France, the better I shall be pleased.

I have heard from Stella, and heard from the maid. Both letters inform me that the child is born, and that it is a boy. Do they expect me to feel any interest in the boy? He is my worst enemy before he is out of his long clothes.

Stella writes kindly enough. Not a line in her letter, however, invites me, or holds out the prospect of inviting me, to St. Germain. She refers to her mother very

briefly, merely informing me that Mrs. Eyrecourt is well, and is already enjoying the gaieties of Paris. Three-fourths of the letter are occupied with the baby. When I wrote to her I signed myself ‘yours affectionately.’ Stella signs ‘yours sincerely.’ It is a trifle, I dare say—but I feel it, for all that.

Matilda is faithful to her engagement ; Matilda’s letter tells me the truth.

‘ Since the birth of the baby,’ she writes, ‘ Mrs. Romaine has never once mentioned your name ; she can talk of nothing, and think of nothing, but her child. I make every allowance, I hope, for a lady in her melancholy situation. But I do think it is not very grateful to have quite forgotten Mr. Winterfield, who has done so much for her, and who only asks to pass a few hours

of his day innocently in her society. Perhaps, being a single woman, I write ignorantly about mothers and babies. But I have my feelings; and (though I never liked Mr. Romaine) I feel for *you*, sir—if you will forgive the familiarity. In my opinion this new craze about the baby will wear out. He is already a cause of difference of opinion. My good mistress, who possesses knowledge of the world, and a kind heart as well, advises that Mr. Romaine should be informed of the birth of a son and heir. Mrs. Eyrecourt says, most truly, that the hateful old priest will get possession of Mr. Romaine's property, to the prejudice of the child, unless steps are taken to shame him into doing justice to his own son. But Mrs. Romaine is as proud as Lucifer; she will not hear of making the first advances, as

she calls it. "The man who has deserted me," she says, "has no heart to be touched either by wife or child." My mistress does not agree with her. There have been hard words already, and the nice old French gentleman and his wife try to make peace. You will smile when I tell you that they offer sugar-plums as a sort of composing gift. My mistress accepts the gift, and has been to the theatre at Paris, with Monsieur and Madame Villeray, more than once already. To conclude, sir, if I might venture to advise you, I should recommend trying the effect on Mrs. R. of absence and silence.'

A most sensibly written letter. I shall certainly take Matilda's advice. My name is never mentioned by Stella—and not a day has passed without my thinking of her!

Well, I suppose a man can harden his heart if he likes. Let me harden *my* heart, and forget her.

The crew shall have three days ashore at Naples, and then we sail for Alexandria. In that port the yacht will wait my return. I have not yet visited the cataracts of the Nile; I have not yet seen the magnificent mouse-coloured women of Nubia. A tent in the desert, and a dusky daughter of Nature to keep house for me—there is a new life for a man who is weary of the vapid civilisation of Europe! I shall begin by letting my beard grow.

Fifth Extract.

Civita Vecchia, February 28, 1863.

—Back again on the coast of Italy—

after an absence, at sea and ashore, of nine months!

What have my travels done for me? They have made me browner and thinner; they have given me a more patient mind, and a taste for mild tobacco. Have they helped me to forget Stella? Not the least in the world—I am more eager than ever to see her again. When I look back at my diary I am really ashamed of my own fretfulness and impatience. What miserable vanity on my part to expect her to think of me, when she was absorbed in the first cares and joys of maternity; especially sacred to her, poor soul, as the one consolation of her melancholy life! I withdraw all that I wrote about her—and from the bottom of my heart I forgive the baby.

Rome, March 1.—I have found my letters waiting for me at the office of my banker.

The latest news from St. Germain is all that I could wish. In acknowledging the receipt of my last letter from Cairo (I broke my rash vow of silence when we got into port, after leaving Naples) Stella sends me the long-desired invitation. ‘Pray take care to return to us, dear Bernard, before the first anniversary of my boy’s birthday, on the twenty-seventh of March.’ After those words she need feel no apprehension of my being late at my appointment. Traveller—the dog has well merited his name by this time—will have to bid good-bye to the yacht (which he loves), and journey homeward by the railway (which he hates).

No more risk of storms and delays for me. Good-bye to the sea for one while.

I have sent the news of my safe return from the East, by telegraph. But I must not be in too great a hurry to leave Rome, or I shall commit a serious error—I shall disappoint Stella's mother.

Mrs. Eyrecourt writes to me earnestly, requesting, if I return by way of Italy, that I will get her some information about Romaine. She is eager to know whether they have made him a priest yet. I am also to discover, if I can, what are his prospects—whether he is as miserable as he deserves to be—whether he has been disappointed in his expectations, and is likely to be brought back to his senses in that way—and, above all, whether Father Benwell is still at Rome with him. My idea is that

Mrs. Eyrecourt has not given up her design of making Romaine acquainted with the birth of his son.

The right person to apply to for information is evidently my banker. He has been a resident in Rome for twenty years—but he is too busy a man to be approached, by an idler like myself, in business hours. I have asked him to dine with me to-morrow.

March 2.—My guest has just left me. I am afraid Mrs. Eyrecourt will be sadly disappointed when she hears what I have to tell her.

The moment I mentioned Romaine's name, the banker looked at me with an expression of surprise. 'The man most talked about in Rome,' he said; 'I wonder you have not heard of him already.'

‘ Is he a priest ? ’

‘ Certainly ! And, what is more, the ordinary preparations for the priesthood were expressly shortened by high authority on his account. The Pope takes the greatest interest in him ; and as for the people, the Italians have already nicknamed him “ the young cardinal.” Don’t suppose, as some of our countrymen do, that he is indebted to his wealth for the high position which he has already attained. His wealth is only one of the minor influences in his favour. The truth is, he unites in himself two opposite qualities, both of the greatest value to the Church, which are very rarely found combined in the same man. He has already made a popular reputation here, as a most eloquent and convincing preacher——’

‘ A preacher ! ’ I exclaimed. ‘ And a

popular reputation! How do the Italians understand him?’

The banker looked puzzled.

‘Why shouldn’t they understand a man who addresses them in their own language?’ he said. ‘Romaine could speak Italian when he came here—and since that time he has learnt by constant practice to think in Italian. While our Roman season lasts, he preaches alternately in Italian and in English. But I was speaking of the two opposite accomplishments which this remarkable man possesses. Out of the pulpit, he is capable of applying his mind successfully to the political necessities of the Church. As I am told, his intellect has had severe practical training, by means of historical studies, in the past years of his life. Anyhow, in one of the diplomatic difficulties here be-

tween the Church and the State, he wrote a memorial on the subject, which the Cardinal-Secretary declared to be a model of ability in applying the experience of the past to the need of the present time. If he doesn't wear himself out, his Italian nickname may prove prophetically true. We may live to see the new convert, Cardinal Romaine.'

'Are you acquainted with him yourself?' I asked.

'No Englishman is acquainted with him,' the banker answered. 'There is a report of some romantic event in his life which has led to his leaving England, and which makes him recoil from intercourse with his own nation. Whether this is true or false, it is certain that the English in Rome find him unapproachable. I have even heard

that he refuses to receive letters from England. If you wish to see him, you must do what I have done—you must go to church and look at him in the pulpit. He preaches in English—I think for the last time this season—on Thursday evening next. Shall I call here and take you to the church?’

If I had followed my inclinations, I should have refused. I feel no sort of interest in Romaine—I might even say I feel a downright antipathy towards him. But I have no wish to appear insensible to the banker’s kindness, and my reception at St. Germain depends greatly on the attention I show to Mrs. Eyrecourt’s request. So it was arranged that I should hear the great preacher—with a mental reservation on my part, which contemplated my departure from the church before the end of his sermon.

But, before I see him, I feel assured of one thing—especially after what the banker has told me. Stella's view of his character is the right one. The man who has deserted her has no heart to be touched by wife or child. They are separated for ever.

March 3.—I have just seen the landlord of the hotel; he can help me to answer one of Mrs. Eyrecourt's questions. A nephew of his holds some employment at the Jesuit head-quarters here, adjoining their famous church *Il Gesù*. I have requested the young man to ascertain if Father Benwell is still in Rome—without mentioning me. It would be no small trial to my self-control if we met in the street.

March 4.—Good news this time for

Mrs. Eyrecourt, so far as it goes. Father Benwell has long since left Rome, and has returned to his regular duties in England. If he exercises any further influence over Romaine, it must be done by letter.

March 5. — I have returned from Romaine's sermon. This double renegade — has he not deserted his religion and his wife? — has failed to convince my reason. But he has so completely upset my nerves, that I ordered a bottle of champagne (to the great amusement of my friend the banker) the moment we got back to the hotel.

We drove through the scantily lighted streets of Rome to a small church in the neighbourhood of the Piazza Navona. To a more imaginative man than myself, the scene

when we entered the building would have been too impressive to be described in words—though it might perhaps have been painted. The one light in the place glimmered mysteriously from a great wax candle, burning in front of a drapery of black cloth, and illuminating dimly a sculptured representation, in white marble, of the crucified Christ, wrought to the size of life. In front of this ghastly emblem a platform projected, also covered with black cloth. We could penetrate no further than to the space just inside the door of the church. Everywhere else the building was filled with standing, sitting, and kneeling figures, shadowy and mysterious, fading away in far corners into impenetrable gloom. The only sounds were the low wailing notes of the organ, accompanied at intervals

by the muffled thump of fanatic worshippers penitentially beating their breasts. On a sudden the organ ceased ; the self-inflicted blows of the penitents were heard no more. In the breathless silence that followed, a man robed in black mounted the black platform, and faced the congregation. His hair had become prematurely grey ; his face was of the ghastly paleness of the great crucifix at his side. The light of the candle, falling on him as he slowly turned his head, cast shadows into the hollows of his cheeks, and glittered in his gleaming eyes. In tones low and trembling at first, he stated the subject of his address. A week since, two noteworthy persons had died in Rome on the same day. One of them was a woman of exemplary piety, whose funeral obsequies had been celebrated in that church. The

other was a criminal charged with homicide under provocation, who had died in prison, refusing the services of the priest—impenitent to the last. The sermon followed the spirit of the absolved woman to its eternal reward in heaven, and described the meeting with dear ones who had gone before, in terms so devout and so touching that the women near us, and even some of the men, burst into tears. Far different was the effect produced when the preacher, filled with the same overpowering sincerity of belief which had inspired his description of the joys of heaven, traced the downward progress of the lost man, from his impenitent death-bed to his doom in hell. The dreadful superstition of everlasting torment became doubly dreadful in the priest's fervent words. He described the retributive voices of the

mother and the brother of the murdered man ringing incessantly in the ears of the homicide. 'I, who speak to you, hear the voices,' he cried. 'Assassin! assassin! where are you? I see him—I see the assassin hurled into his place in the sleepless ranks of the damned—I see him, dripping with the flames that burn for ever, writhing under the torments that are without respite and without end.' The climax of this terrible effort of imagination was reached when he fell on his knees and prayed with sobs and cries of entreaty—prayed, pointing to the crucifix at his side—that he and all who heard him might die the death of penitent sinners, absolved in the divinely atoning name of Christ. The hysterical shrieks of women rang through the church. I could endure it no longer. I hurried into the

street, and breathed again freely, when I looked up at the cloudless beauty of the night sky, bright with the peaceful radiance of the stars.

And this man was Romaine ! I had last met with him among his delightful works of art ; an enthusiast in literature ; the hospitable master of a house filled with comforts and luxuries to its remotest corner. And now I had seen what Rome had made of him.

‘ Yes,’ said my companion, ‘ the Ancient Church not only finds out the men who can best serve it, but develops qualities in those men of which they have been themselves unconscious. The advance which Roman Catholic Christianity has been, and is still, making has its intelligible reason. Thanks to the great Reformation, the papal scandals

of past centuries have been atoned for by the exemplary lives of servants of the Church, in high places and low places alike. If a new Luther arose among us, where would he now find abuses sufficiently wicked and widely spread to shock the sense of decency in Christendom? He would find them nowhere—and he would probably return to the respectable shelter of the Roman sheep-fold.’

I listened, without making any remark. To tell the truth, I was thinking of Stella.

March 6.—I have been to Civita Vecchia, to give a little farewell entertainment to the officers and crew before they take the yacht back to England.

In a few words I said at parting, I mentioned that it was my purpose to make an

offer for the purchase of the vessel, and that my guests should hear from me again on the subject. This announcement was received with enthusiasm. I really like my crew—and I don't think it is vain in me to believe that they return the feeling, from the sailing-master to the cabin-boy. My future life, after all that has passed, is likely to be a roving life, unless——No! I may think sometimes of that happier prospect, but I had better not put my thoughts into words. I have a fine vessel; I have plenty of money; and I like the sea. There are three good reasons for buying the yacht.

Returning to Rome in the evening, I found waiting for me a letter from Stella.

She writes (immediately on the receipt of my telegram) to make a similar request to the request addressed to me by her mother.

Now that I am at Rome, she too wants to hear news of a Jesuit priest. He is absent on a foreign mission, and his name is Penrose. 'You shall hear what obligations I owe to his kindness,' she writes, 'when we meet. In the meantime, I will only say that he is the exact opposite of Father Benwell, and that I should be the most ungrateful of women if I did not feel the truest interest in his welfare.'

This is strange, and, to my mind, not satisfactory. Who is Penrose? and what has he done to deserve such strong expressions of gratitude? If anybody had told me that Stella could make a friend of a Jesuit, I am afraid I should have returned a rude answer. Well, I must wait for further enlightenment, and apply to the landlord's nephew once more.

March 7.—There is small prospect, I fear, of my being able to appreciate the merits of Mr. Penrose by personal experience. He is thousands of miles away from Europe, and he is in a situation of peril, which makes the chance of his safe return doubtful in the last degree.

The Mission to which he is attached was originally destined to find its field of work in Central America. Rumours of more fighting to come, in that revolutionary part of the world, reached Rome before the missionaries had sailed from the port of Leghorn. Under these discouraging circumstances, the priestly authorities changed the destination of the Mission to the territory of Arizona, bordering on New Mexico, and recently purchased by the United States. Here, in the valley of Santa Cruz, the

Jesuits had first attempted the conversion of the Indian tribes two hundred years since, and had failed. Their mission-house and chapel are now a heap of ruins, and the ferocious Apache Indians keep the fertile valley a solitude by the mere terror of their name. To this ill-omened place Penrose and his companions have made their daring pilgrimage ; and they are now risking their lives in the attempt to open the hearts of these bloodthirsty savages to the influence of Christianity. Nothing has been yet heard of them. At the best, no trustworthy news is expected for months to come.

What will Stella say to this? Anyhow, I begin to understand her interest in Penrose now. He is one of a company of heroes. I am already anxious to hear more of him.

To-morrow will be a memorable day in my calendar. To-morrow I leave Rome for St. Germain.

If any further information is to be gained for Mrs. Eyrecourt and her daughter, I have made the necessary arrangements for receiving it. The banker has promised to write to me, if there is a change in Romaine's life and prospects. And my landlord will take care that I hear of it, in the event of news reaching Rome from the Mission at Arizona.

Sixth Extract.

St. Germain, March 14. — I arrived yesterday. Between the fatigue of the journey and the pleasurable agitation caused by seeing Stella again, I was unfit to make the

customary entry in my diary when I retired for the night.

She is more irresistibly beautiful than ever. Her figure (a little too slender as I remember it) has filled out. Her lovely face has lost its haggard, careworn look ; her complexion has recovered its delicacy ; I see again in her eyes the pure serenity of expression which first fascinated me, years since. It may be due to the consoling influence of the child—assisted, perhaps, by the lapse of time and the peaceful life which she now leads—but this at least is certain, such a change for the better I never could have imagined as the change I find in Stella after a year's absence.

As for the baby, he is a bright, good-humoured little fellow ; and he has one great merit in my estimation—he bears no

resemblance to his father. I saw his mother's features when I first took him on my knee, and looked at his face, lifted to mine in grave surprise. The baby and I are certain to get on well together.

Even Mrs. Eyrecourt seems to have improved in the French air, and under the French diet. She has a better surface to lay the paint on ; her nimble tongue runs faster than ever ; and she has so completely recovered her good spirits, that Monsieur and Madame Villeray declare she must have French blood in her veins. They were all so unaffectedly glad to see me (Matilda included), that it was really like returning to one's home. As for Traveller, I must interfere (in the interests of his figure and his health) to prevent everybody in the house from feeding him with every eatable

thing, from plain bread to *pâté de foie gras*.

My experience of to-day will, as Stella tells me, be my general experience of the family life at St. Germain.

We begin the morning with the customary cup of coffee. At eleven o'clock I am summoned from my 'pavilion' of three rooms to one of those delicious and artfully-varied breakfasts which are only to be found in France and in Scotland. An interval of about three hours follows, during which the child takes his airing and his siesta, and his elders occupy themselves as they please. At three o'clock we all go out—with a pony chaise which carries the weaker members of the household—for a ramble in the forest. At six o'clock we assemble at the dinner-table. At coffee

time, some of the neighbours drop in for a game at cards. At ten, we all wish each other good-night.

Such is the domestic programme, varied by excursions in the country and by occasional visits to Paris. I am naturally a man of quiet stay-at-home habits. It is only when my mind is disturbed that I get restless and feel longings for change. Surely the quiet routine at St. Germain ought to be welcome to me now? I have been looking forward to this life through a long year of travel. What more can I wish for?

Nothing more, of course.

And yet—and yet—Stella has innocently made it harder than ever to play the part of her ‘brother.’ The recovery of her beauty is a subject for congratulation to her mother and her friends. How does it affect Me?

I had better not think of my hard fate. Can I help thinking of it? Can I dismiss from memory the unmerited misfortunes which have taken from me, in the prime of her charms, the woman whom I love? At least I can try.

The good old moral must be *my* moral:—‘Be content with such things as ye have.’

March 15.—It is eight in the morning—and I hardly know how to employ myself. Having finished my coffee, I have just looked again at my diary.

It strikes me that I am falling into a bad habit of writing too much about myself. The custom of keeping a journal certainly has this drawback—it encourages egotism. Well! the remedy is easy. From this date,

I lock up my book—only to open it again when some event has happened which has a claim to be recorded for its own sake. As for myself and my feelings, they have made their last appearance in these pages.

Seventh Extract.

June 7.—The occasion for opening my diary once more has presented itself this morning.

News has reached me of Romaine, which is too important to be passed over without notice. He has been appointed one of the Pope's Chamberlains. It is also reported, on good authority, that he will be attached to a Papal embassy when a vacancy occurs. These honours, present and to come, seem to remove him farther than ever

from the possibility of a return to his wife and child.

June 8.—In regard to Romaine, Mrs. Eyrecourt seems to be of my opinion.

Being in Paris to-day, at a morning concert, she there met with her old friend, Doctor Wybrow. The famous physician is suffering from overwork, and is on his way to Italy for a few months of rest and recreation. They took a drive together, after the performance, in the Bois de Boulogne; and Mrs. Eyrecourt opened her mind to the doctor, as freely as usual, on the subject of Stella and the child. He entirely agreed (speaking in the future interests of the boy) that precious time has been lost in informing Romaine of the birth of an heir; and he has promised, no matter

what obstacles may be placed in his way, to make the announcement himself, when he reaches Rome.

June 9.—Madame Villaray has been speaking to me confidentially on a very delicate subject.

I am pledged to discontinue writing about myself. But in these private pages I may note the substance of what my good friend said to me. If I only look back often enough at this little record, I may gather the resolution to profit by her advice. In brief, these were her words:—

‘Stella has spoken to me in confidence, since she met you accidentally in the garden yesterday. She cannot be guilty of the poor affectation of concealing what you must have already discovered for yourself. But

she prefers to say the words that must be said to you, through me. Her husband's conduct to her is an outrage that she can never forget. She now looks back with sentiments of repulsion, which she dare not describe, to that "love at first sight" (as you call it in England), conceived on the day when they first met—and she remembers regretfully that other love, of years since, which was love of steadier and slower growth. To her shame she confesses that she failed to set you the example of duty and self-restraint when you two happened to be alone yesterday. She leaves it to my discretion to tell you that you must see her for the future, always in the presence of some other person. Make no reference to this when you next meet; and understand that she has only spoken to me instead of to

her mother, because she fears that Mrs. Eyrecourt might use harsh words, and distress you again, as she once distressed you in England. If you will take my advice, you will ask permission to go away again on your travels.'

It matters nothing what I said in reply. Let me only relate that we were interrupted by the appearance of the nursemaid at the pavilion door.

She led the child by the hand. Among his first efforts at speaking, under his mother's instruction, had been the effort to call me Uncle Bernard. He had now got as far as the first syllable of my Christian name, and he had come to me to repeat his lesson. Resting his little hands on my knees, he looked up at me with his mother's eyes, and said, 'Uncle Ber'.' A trifling

ncident, but, at that moment, it cut me to the heart. I could only take the boy in my arms, and look at Madame Villeray. The good woman felt for me. I saw tears in her eyes.

No ! no more writing about myself. I close the book again.

Eighth Extract.

July 3.—A letter has reached Mrs. Eyrecourt this morning, from Doctor Wybrow. It is dated, ‘Castel Gandolpho, near Rome.’ Here the doctor is established during the hot months—and here he has seen Romaine, in attendance on the ‘Holy Father,’ in the famous summer palace of the Popes. How he obtained the interview Mrs. Eyrecourt is not informed. To a man of his

celebrity, doors are no doubt opened which remain closed to persons less widely known.

‘I have performed my promise,’ he writes, ‘and I may say for myself that I spoke with every needful precaution. The result a little startled me. Romaine was not merely unprepared to hear of the birth of his child—he was physically and morally incapable of sustaining the shock of the disclosure. For the moment, I thought he had been seized with a fit of catalepsy. He moved, however, when I tried to take his hand to feel the pulse—shrinking back in his chair, and feebly signing to me to leave him. I committed him to the care of his servant. The next day I received a letter from one of his priestly colleagues, informing me that he was slowly recovering after the shock that I had inflicted, and requesting me

to hold no further communication with him, either personally or by letter. I wish I could have sent you a more favourable report of my interference in this painful matter. Perhaps you or your daughter may hear from him.'

July 4-9.—No letter has been received. Mrs. Eyrecourt is uneasy. Stella, on the contrary, seems to be relieved.

July 10.—A letter has arrived from London, addressed to Stella by Romaine's English lawyers. The income which Mrs. Romaine has refused for herself is to be legally settled on her child. Technical particulars follow, which it is needless to repeat here.

By return of post, Stella has answered

the lawyers, declaring that, so long as she lives, and has any influence over her son, he shall not touch the offered income. Mrs. Eyrecourt, Monsieur and Madame Villeray—and even Matilda—entreated her not to send the letter. To my thinking, Stella acted with becoming spirit. Though there is no entail, still Vange Abbey is morally the boy's birthright—it is a cruel wrong to offer him anything else.

July 11.—For the second time I have proposed to leave St. Germain. The presence of the third person, whenever I am in her company, is becoming unendurable to me. She still uses her influence to defer my departure. ‘Nobody sympathises with me,’ she said, ‘but you.’

I am failing to keep my promise to

myself, not to write about myself. But there is some little excuse this time. For the relief of my own conscience, I may surely place it on record that I have tried to do what is right. It is not my fault if I remain at St. Germain, insensible to Madame Villeray's warning.

Ninth Extract.

September 13.—Terrible news from Rome of the Jesuit Mission to Arizona.

The Indians have made a night attack on the new mission-house. The building is burnt to the ground, and the missionaries have been massacred—with the exception of two priests, carried away captive. The names of the priests are not known. News of the atrocity has been delayed four months

on its way to Europe, owing partly to the civil war in the United States, and partly to disturbances in Central America.

Looking at the 'Times' (which we receive regularly at St. Germain), I found this statement confirmed in a short paragraph—but here also the names of the two prisoners failed to appear.

Our one present hope of getting any further information seems to me to depend on our English newspaper. The 'Times' stands alone as the one public journal which has the whole English nation for volunteer contributors. In their troubles at home, they appeal to the Editor. In their travels abroad, over civilised and savage regions alike, if they meet with an adventure worth mentioning they tell it to the Editor. If any one of our countrymen knows anything of

this dreadful massacre, I foresee with certainty where we shall find the information in print.

Soon after my arrival here, Stella had told me of her memorable conversation with Penrose in the garden at Ten Acres Lodge. I was well acquainted with the nature of her obligation to the young priest, but I was not prepared for the outbreak of grief which escaped her when she had read the telegram from Rome. She actually went the length of saying, ‘I shall never enjoy another happy moment till I know whether Penrose is one of the two living priests!’

The inevitable third person with us, this morning, was Monsieur Villeray. Sitting at the window with a book in his hand—sometimes reading, sometimes looking at the garden with the eye of a fond horticulturist

—he discovered a strange cat among his flower beds. Forgetful of every other consideration, the old gentleman hobbled out to drive away the intruder, and left us together.

I spoke to Stella, in words which I would now give everything I possess to recall. A detestable jealousy took possession of me. I meanly hinted that Penrose could claim no great merit (in the matter of Romaine's conversion) for yielding to the entreaties of a beautiful woman who had fascinated him, though he might be afraid to own it. She protested against my unworthy insinuation—but she failed to make me ashamed of myself. Is a woman ever ignorant of the influence which her beauty exercises over a man? I went on, like the miserable creature that I was, from bad to worse.

‘Excuse me,’ I said, ‘if I have unintentionally made you angry. I ought to have known that I was treading on delicate ground. Your interest in Penrose may be due to a warmer motive than a sense of obligation.’

She turned away from me—sadly, not angrily—intending, as it appeared, to leave the room in silence. Arrived at the door, she altered her mind, and came back.

‘Even if you insult me, Bernard, I am not able to resent it,’ she said, very gently. ‘I once wronged *you*—I have no right to complain of your now wronging me. I will try to forget it.’

She held out her hand. She raised her eyes—and looked at me.

It was not her fault; I alone am to blame. In another moment she was in my arms. I held her to my breast—I felt the

quick beating of her heart on me—I poured out the wild confession of my sorrow, my shame, my love—I tasted again and again and again the sweetness of her lips. She put her arms round my neck, and drew her head back with a long sigh. ‘Be merciful to my weakness,’ she whispered. ‘We must meet no more.’

She pushed me back from her, with a trembling hand, and left the room.

I have broken my resolution not to write about myself—but there is no egotism, there is a sincere sense of humiliation in me, when I record this confession of misconduct. I can make but one atonement—I must at once leave St. Germain. Now, when it is too late, I feel how hard for me this life of constant repression has been.

Thus far I had written, when the nurse-

maid brought me a little note, addressed in pencil. No answer was required.

The few lines were in Stella's handwriting:—‘You must not leave us too suddenly, or you may excite my mother's suspicions. Wait until you receive letters from England, and make them the pretext for your departure.—S.’

I never thought of her mother. She is right. Even if she were wrong, I must obey her.

September 14.—The letters from England have arrived. One of them presents me with the necessary excuse for my departure, ready made. My proposal for the purchase of the yacht is accepted. The sailing-master and crew have refused all offers of engagement, and are waiting at

Cowes for my orders. Here is an absolute necessity for my return to England.

The newspaper arrived with the letters. My anticipations have been realised. Yesterday's paragraph has produced another volunteer contributor. An Englishman just returned from Central America, after travelling in Arizona, writes to the 'Times.' He publishes his name and address—and he declares that he has himself seen the two captive priests.

The name of this correspondent carries its own guarantee with it. He is no less a person than Mr. Murthwaite—the well-known traveller in India, who discovered the lost diamond called 'The Moonstone,' set in the forehead of a Hindoo idol. He writes to the editor as follows:—

'Sir,—I can tell you something of the

two Jesuit priests who were the sole survivors of the massacre in the Santa Cruz Valley four months since.

‘I was travelling at the time in Arizona, under the protection of an Apache chief, bribed to show me his country and his nation (instead of cutting my throat and tearing off my scalp) by a present tribute of whisky and gunpowder, and by the promise of more when our association came to an end.

‘About twelve miles northward of the little silver-mining town of Tubac we came upon an Apache encampment. I at once discovered two white men among the Indians. These were the captive priests.

‘One of them was a Frenchman, named L’Herbier. The other was an Englishman,

named Penrose. They owed their lives to the influence of two powerful considerations among the Indians. Unhappy L'Herbier lost his senses under the horror of the night massacre. Insanity, as you may have heard, is a sacred thing in the estimation of the American savages: they regard this poor madman as a mysteriously-inspired person. The other priest, Penrose, had been in charge of the mission medicine-chest, and had successfully treated cases of illness among the Apaches. As a "great medicine-man," he too is a privileged person—under the strong protection of their interest in their own health. The lives of the prisoners are in no danger, provided they can endure the hardship of their wandering existence among the Indians. Penrose spoke to me with the

resignation of a true hero. "I am in the hands of God," he said; "and if I die, I die in God's service."

'I was entirely unprovided with the means of ransoming the missionaries—and nothing that I could say, or that I could promise, had the smallest effect on the savages. But for severe and tedious illness, I should long since have been on my way back to Arizona with the necessary ransom. As it is, I am barely strong enough to write this letter. But I can head a subscription to pay expenses; and I can give instructions to any person who is willing to attempt the deliverance of the priests.'

So the letter ended.

Before I had read it, I was at a loss to know where to go, or what to do, when I leave St. Germain. I am now at no loss.

I have found an object in life, and a means of making atonement to Stella for my own ungracious and unworthy words. Already I have communicated by telegraph with Mr. Murthwaite and with my sailing-master. The first is informed that I hope to be with him, in London, to-morrow morning. The second is instructed to have the yacht fitted out immediately for a long voyage. If I can save these men—especially Penrose—I shall not have lived in vain.

London, September 15.—No. I have resolution enough to go to Arizona, but I have no courage to record the parting scene when it was time to say good-bye.

I had intended to keep the coming enterprise a secret, and only to make the disclosure in writing when the vessel was

ready to sail. But, after reading the letter to the 'Times,' Stella saw something in my face (as I suppose) that betrayed me. Well, it's over now. I do my best to keep myself from thinking of it—and, for this reason, I abstain from dwelling on the subject here.

Mr. Murthwaite has not only given me valuable instructions—he has provided me with letters of introduction to persons in office, and to the *padres* (or priests) in Mexico, which will be of incalculable use in such an expedition as mine. In the present disturbed condition of the United States, he recommends me to sail for a port on the eastern coast of Mexico, and then to travel northward overland, and make my first inquiries in Arizona at the town of Tubac. Time is of such importance, in his opinion, that he suggests making inquiries in

London and Liverpool for a merchant vessel under immediate sailing orders for Vera Cruz or Tampico. The fitting-out of the yacht cannot be accomplished, I find, in less than a fortnight or three weeks. I have therefore taken Mr. Murthwaite's advice.

September 16.—No favourable answer, so far as the port of London is concerned. Very little commerce with Mexico, and bad harbours in that country when you do trade. Such is the report.

September 17.—A Mexican brig has been discovered at Liverpool, under orders for Vera Cruz. But the vessel is in debt, and the date of departure depends on expected remittances! In this state of things

I may wait, with my conscience at ease, to sail in comfort on board my own schooner.

September 18-30.—I have settled my affairs; I have taken leave of my friends (good Mr. Murthwaite included); I have written cheerfully to Stella; and I sail from Portsmouth to-morrow, well provided with the jars of whisky and the kegs of gunpowder which will effect the release of the captives.

It is strange, considering the serious matters I have to think of, but it is also true, that I feel out of spirits at the prospect of leaving England without my travelling companion, the dog. I am afraid to take the dear old fellow with me, on such a perilous expedition as mine may be. Stella takes

care of him—and, if I don't live to return, she will never part with him, for his master's sake. It implies a childish sort of mind, I suppose—but it is a comfort to me to remember that I have never said a hard word to Traveller, and never lifted my hand on him in anger.

All this about a dog! And not a word about Stella? Not a word. *Those* thoughts are not to be written.

‘I have reached the last page of my diary. I shall lock it, and leave it in charge of my bankers, on my way to the Portsmouth train. Shall I ever want a new diary? Superstitious people might associate this coming to the end of the book with coming to an end of another kind. I have no imagination, and I take my leap in the dark

hopefully—with Byron's glorious lines in my mind :

Here's a sigh to those who love me,
And a smile to those that hate ;
And whatever sky's above me,
Here's heart for every fate !

(An enclosure is inserted here, marking a lapse of seven months, before the entries in the diary are resumed. It consists of two telegrams, despatched respectively on the 1st and 2nd of May, 1864.)

1. ' From Bernard Winterfield, Portsmouth, England. To Mrs. Romaine, care of M. Villeray, St. Germain, near Paris.—Penrose is safe on board my yacht. His unfortunate companion has died of exhaustion, and he is himself in a feeble state of health. I at once take him with me to London for medical advice. We are eager for news of you. Telegraph to Derwent's Hotel.'

2. 'From Mrs. Eyrecourt, St. Germain. To Bernard Winterfield, Derwent's Hotel, London.—Your telegram received with joy, and sent on to Stella in Paris. All well. But strange events have happened. If you cannot come here at once, go to Lord Loring. He will tell you everything.'

Tenth Extract.

London, 2nd May, 1864.—Mrs. Eyrecourt's telegram reached me just after Doctor Wybrow had paid his first professional visit to Penrose, at the hotel. I had hardly time to feel relieved by the opinion of the case which he expressed, before my mind was upset by Mrs. Eyrecourt. Leaving Penrose under the charge of our excellent landlady, I hurried away to Lord Loring.

It was still early in the day : his lordship was at home. He maddened me with impatience by apologising at full length for 'the inexcusable manner in which he had misinterpreted my conduct on the deplorable occasion of the marriage ceremony at Brussels.' I stopped his flow of words (very earnestly spoken, it is only right to add), and entreated him to tell me, in the first place, what Stella was doing in Paris.

'Stella is with her husband,' Lord Loring replied.

My head turned giddy, my heart beat furiously. Lord Loring looked at me—ran to the luncheon table in the next room—and returned with a glass of wine. I really don't know whether I drank the wine or not. I know I stammered out another inquiry in one word.

‘Reconciled?’ I said.

‘Yes, Mr. Winterfield—reconciled, before he dies.’

We were both silent for awhile.

What was he thinking of? I don’t know. What was I thinking of? I daren’t write it down.

Lord Loring resumed by expressing some anxiety on the subject of my health. I made the best excuse for myself that I could, and told him of the rescue of Penrose. He had heard of my object in leaving England, and heartily congratulated me. ‘This will be welcome news indeed,’ he said, ‘to Father Benwell.’

Even the name of Father Benwell now excites my distrust. ‘Is *he* in Paris too?’ I inquired.

‘He left Paris last night,’ Lord Loring

answered ; ‘and he is now in London, on important business (as I understand) connected with Romaine’s affairs.’

I instantly thought of the boy.

‘Is Romaine in possession of his faculties?’ I asked.

‘In complete possession.’

‘While justice is in his power, has he done justice to his son?’

Lord Loring looked a little confused. ‘I have not heard,’ was all he said in reply.

I was far from satisfied. ‘You are one of Romaine’s oldest friends,’ I persisted. ‘Have you not seen him yourself?’

‘I have seen him more than once. But he has never referred to his affairs.’ Having said this he hastily changed the subject. ‘Is there any other information that I can give you?’ he suggested.

I had still to learn under what circumstances Romaine had left Italy for France, and how the event of his illness in Paris had been communicated to his wife. Lord Loring had only to draw on his own recollections to enlighten me.

‘Lady Loring and I passed the last winter in Rome,’ he said. ‘And, there, we saw Romaine. You look surprised. Perhaps you are aware that we had offended him, by advice which we thought it our duty to offer to Stella before her marriage?’

I was certainly thinking of what Stella had said of the Loring on the memorable day when she visited me at the hotel.

‘Romaine would probably have refused to receive us,’ Lord Loring resumed, ‘but for the gratifying circumstance of my having

been admitted to an interview with the Pope. The Holy Father spoke of him with the most condescending kindness ; and, hearing that I had not yet seen him, gave instructions, commanding Romaine to present himself. Under these circumstances it was impossible for him to refuse to receive Lady Loring and myself on a later occasion. I cannot tell you how distressed we were at the sad change for the worse in his personal appearance. The Italian physician, whom he occasionally consulted, told me that there was a weakness in the action of his heart, produced, in the first instance, by excessive study and the excitement of preaching, and aggravated by the further drain on his strength due to insufficient nourishment. He would eat and drink just enough to keep him alive, and no more ; and he persistently refused to try the

good influence of rest and change of scene. My wife, at a later interview with him, when they were alone, induced him to throw aside the reserve which he had maintained with me, and discovered another cause for the deterioration in his health. I don't refer to the return of a nervous misery, from which he has suffered at intervals for years past ; I speak of the effect produced on his mind by the announcement—made no doubt with the best intentions by Doctor Wybrow—of the birth of his child. This disclosure (he was entirely ignorant of his wife's situation when he left her) appears to have affected him far more seriously than the English doctor supposed. Lady Loring was so shocked at what he said to her on the subject, that she has only repeated it to me with a certain reserve. "If I could believe I did wrong," he said,

“in dedicating myself to the service of the Church, after the overthrow of my domestic happiness, I should also believe that the birth of this child was the retributive punishment of my sin, and the warning of my approaching death. I dare not take this view. And yet I have it not in me, after the solemn vows by which I am bound, to place any more consoling interpretation on an event which, as a priest, it disturbs and humiliates me even to think of.” That one revelation of his tone of thought will tell you what is the mental state of this unhappy man. He gave us little encouragement to continue our friendly intercourse with him. It was only when we were thinking of our return to England that we heard of his appointment to the vacant place of first attaché to the embassy at Paris. The Pope’s paternal

anxiety on the subject of Romaine's health had chosen this wise and generous method of obliging him to try a salutary change of air, as well as a relaxation from his incessant employments in Rome. On the occasion of his departure we met again. He looked like a worn-out old man. We could now only remember his double claim on us—as a priest of our religion, and as a once dear friend—and we arranged to travel with him. The weather at the time was mild; our progress was made by easy stages. We left him at Paris, apparently the better for his journey.'

I asked if they had seen Stella on that occasion.

'No,' said Lord Loring. 'We had reason to doubt whether Stella would be pleased to see us, and we felt reluctant to

meddle, unasked, with a matter of extreme delicacy. I arranged with the Nuncio (whom I have the honour to know) that we should receive written information of Romaine's state of health, and on that understanding we returned to England. A week since, our news from the Embassy was so alarming that Lady Loring at once returned to Paris. Her first letter informed me that she had felt it her duty to tell Stella of the critical condition of Romaine's health. She expressed her sense of my wife's kindness most gratefully and feelingly, and at once removed to Paris, to be on the spot if her husband expressed a wish to see her. The two ladies are now staying at the same hotel, I have thus far been detained in London by family affairs. But, unless I hear of a change for the better before evening, I

follow Lady Loring to Paris by the mail train.'

It was needless to trespass further on Lord Loring's time. I thanked him, and returned to Penrose. He was sleeping when I got to the hotel.

On the table in the sitting-room I found a telegram waiting for me. It had been sent by Stella, and it contained these lines :—

'I have just returned from his bedside, after telling him of the rescue of Penrose. He desires to see you. There is no positive suffering—he is sinking under a complete prostration of the forces of life. That is what the doctors tell me. They said, when I spoke of writing to you, "Send a telegram ; there is no time to lose." '

Towards evening Penrose awoke. I showed him the telegram. Throughout our

voyage, the prospect of seeing Romaine again had been the uppermost subject in his thoughts. In the extremity of his distress, he declared that he would accompany me to Paris by the night train. Remembering how severely he had felt the fatigue of the short railway journey from Portsmouth, I entreated him to let me go alone. His devotion to Romaine was not to be reasoned with. While we were still vainly trying to convince each other, Doctor Wybrow came in.

To my amazement, he sided with Penrose.

‘Oh, get up by all means,’ he said; ‘we will help you to dress.’ We took him out of bed and put on his dressing-gown. He thanked us; and saying he would complete his toilette by himself, sat down in an easy chair.

In another moment he was asleep again, so soundly asleep that we put him back in his bed without waking him. Doctor Wybrow had foreseen this result: he looked at the poor fellow's pale peaceful face with a kindly smile.

‘There is the treatment,’ he said, ‘that will set our patient on his legs again. Sleeping, eating, and drinking—let that be his life for some weeks to come, and he will be as good a man as ever. If your homeward journey had been by land, Penrose would have died on the way. I will take care of him while you are in Paris.’

At the station I met Lord Loring. He understood that I too had received bad news, and gave me a place in the *coupé* carriage which had been reserved for him. We had hardly taken our seats when we

saw Father Benwell among the travellers on the platform, accompanied by a grey-haired gentleman who was a stranger to both of us. Lord Loring dislikes strangers. Otherwise, I might have found myself travelling to Paris with that detestable Jesuit for a companion.

Paris, 3rd May.—On our arrival at the hotel I was informed that no message had yet been received from the Embassy.

We found Lady Loring alone at the breakfast table, when we had rested after our night-journey.

‘Romaine still lives,’ she said. ‘But his voice has sunk to a whisper, and he is unable to breathe if he tries to rest in bed. Stella has gone to the Embassy; she hopes to see him to-day for the second time.’

‘Only for the second time!’ I exclaimed.

‘You forget, Mr. Winterfield, that Romaine is a priest. He was only consecrated on the customary condition of an absolute separation from his wife. On her side—never let her know that I told you this—Stella signed a formal document, sent from Rome, asserting that she consented of her own free will to the separation. She was relieved from the performance of another formality (which I need not mention more particularly) by a special dispensation. Under these circumstances—communicated to me while Stella and I have been together in this house—the wife’s presence at the bedside of her dying husband is regarded by the other priests at the Embassy as a scandal and a profanation. The kindhearted Nuncio

is blamed for having exceeded his powers in yielding (even under protest) to the last wishes of a dying man. He is now in communication with Rome, waiting for the final instructions which are to guide him.'

'Has Romaine seen his child?' I asked.

'Stella has taken the child with her to-day. It is doubtful in the last degree whether the poor little boy will be allowed to enter his father's room. *That* complication is even more serious than the other. The dying Romaine persists in his resolution to see the child. So completely has his way of thinking been altered by the approach of death, and by the closing of the brilliant prospect which was before him, that he even threatens to recant, with his last breath, if his wishes are not complied with. How it will end I cannot even venture to guess.

‘ Unless the merciful course taken by the Nuncio is confirmed,’ said Lord Loring, ‘ it may end in a revival of the protest of the Catholic priests in Germany against the prohibition of marriage to the clergy. The movement began in Silesia in 1826, and was followed by unions (or Leagues, as we should call them now) in Baden, Wurtemberg, Bavaria, and Rhenish Prussia. Later still, the agitation spread to France and Austria. It was only checked by a papal bull issued in 1847, reiterating the final decision of the famous Council of Trent in favour of the celibacy of the priesthood. Few people are aware that this rule has been an institution of slow growth among the clergy of the Church of Rome. Even as late as the twelfth century, there were still

priests who set the prohibition of marriage at defiance.'

I listened, as one of the many ignorant persons alluded to by Lord Loring. It was with difficulty that I fixed my attention on what he was saying. My thoughts wandered to Stella and to the dying man. I looked at the clock.

Lady Loring evidently shared the feeling of suspense that had got possession of me. She rose, and walked to the window.

'Here is the message!' she said, recognising her travelling-servant, as he entered the hotel door.

The man appeared, with a line written on a card. I was requested to present the card at the Embassy, without delay.

4th May.—I am only now able to continue my record of the events of yesterday.

A silent servant received me at the Embassy, looked at the card, and led the way to an upper floor of the house. Arrived at the end of a long passage, he opened a door, and retired.

As I crossed the threshold Stella met me. She took both my hands in hers, and looked at me in silence. All that was true and good and noble expressed itself in that look.

The interval passed, and she spoke—very sadly, very quietly.

‘One more work of mercy, Bernard. Help him to die with a heart at rest.’

She drew back—and I approached him.

He reclined, propped up with pillows, in a large easy chair; it was the one position in which he could still breathe with freedom. The ashy shades of death were on his wasted face. In the eyes alone, as they slowly

turned on me, there still glimmered the waning light of life. One of his arms hung down over the chair; the other was clasped round his child, sitting on his knee. The boy looked at me wonderingly, as I stood by his father. Romayne signed to me to stoop, so that I might hear him.

‘Penrose?’ he asked, faintly whispering.
‘Dear Arthur! Not dying, like me?’

‘I quieted *that* anxiety. For a moment there was even the shadow of a smile on his face, as I told him of the effort that Penrose had vainly made to be the companion of my journey. He asked me, by another gesture, to bend my ear to him once more.

‘My last grateful blessing to Penrose. And to you. May I not say it? You have saved Arthur’—his eyes turned towards Stella—‘you have been *her* best friend.’ He paused

to recover his feeble breath ; looking round the large room, without a creature in it but ourselves. Once more the melancholy shadow of a smile passed over his face—and vanished. I listened, nearer to him still.

‘ Christ took a child on his knee. The priests call themselves ministers of Christ. They have left me, because of *this* child, here on my knee. Wrong, wrong, wrong. Winterfield, Death is a great teacher. I know how I have erred—what I have lost. Wife and child. How poor and barren all the rest of it looks now.’

He was silent for a while. Was he thinking? No: he seemed to be listening—and yet there was no sound in the room. Stella, anxiously watching him, saw the listening expression as I did. Her face showed anxiety, but no surprise.

‘Does it torture you still?’ she asked.

‘No,’ he said; ‘I have never heard it plainly, since I left Rome. It has grown fainter and fainter from that time. It is not a Voice now. It is hardly a whisper: my repentance is accepted, my release is coming.—Where is Winterfield?’

She pointed to me.

‘I spoke of Rome just now. What did Rome remind me of?’ He slowly recovered the lost recollection. ‘Tell Winterfield,’ he whispered to Stella, ‘what the Nuncio said when he knew that I was going to die. The great man reckoned up the dignities that might have been mine if I had lived. From my place here in the Embassy——’

‘Let me say it,’ she gently interposed, ‘and spare your strength for better things. From your place in the Embassy you would

have mounted a step higher to the office of Vice-Legate. Those duties wisely performed, another rise to the Auditorship of the Apostolic Chamber. That office filled, a last step upward to the highest rank left, the rank of a Prince of the Church.'

'All vanity!' said the dying Romaine. He looked at his wife and his child. 'The true happiness was waiting for me here. And I only know it now. Too late. Too late.'

He laid his head back on the pillow, and closed his weary eyes. We thought he was composing himself to sleep. Stella tried to relieve him of the boy. 'No,' he whispered; 'I am only resting my eyes to look at him again.' We waited. The child stared at me, in infantine curiosity. His mother knelt at his side, and whispered in his ear. A bright smile irradiated his face; his clear

brown eyes sparkled ; he repeated the forgotten lesson of the bygone time, and called me once more, ‘ Uncle Ber.’ ’

Romayne heard it. His heavy eyelids opened again. ‘ No,’ he said. ‘ Not uncle. Something better and dearer. Stella, give me your hand ! ’

Still kneeling, she obeyed him. ‘ He slowly raised himself on the chair. ‘ Take her hand,’ he said to me. I too knelt. Her hand lay cold in mine. After a long interval he spoke to me. ‘ Bernard Winterfield,’ he said, ‘ love them, and help them, when I am gone.’ He laid his weak hand on our hands, clasped together. ‘ May God protect you ! may God bless you ! ’ he murmured. ‘ Kiss me, Stella.’

I remember no more. As a man, I

ought to have set a better example ; I ought to have preserved my self-control. It was not to be done. I turned away from them—and burst out crying.

The minutes passed. Many minutes or few minutes, I don't know which.

A soft knock at the door aroused me. I dashed away the useless tears. Stella had retired to the farther end of the room. She was sitting by the fireside, with the child in her arms. I withdrew to the same part of the room, keeping far enough away not to disturb them.

Two strangers came in, and placed themselves on either side of Romaine's chair. He seemed to recognise them unwillingly. From the manner in which they examined him, I inferred that they were

medical men. After a consultation in low tones, one of them went out.

He returned again almost immediately, followed by the grey-headed gentleman whom I had noticed on the journey to Paris—and by Father Benwell.

The Jesuit's vigilant eyes discovered us instantly, in our place near the fireside. I thought I saw suspicion as well as surprise in his face. But he recovered himself so rapidly, that I could not feel sure. He bowed to Stella. She made no return; she looked as if she had not even seen him.

One of the doctors was an Englishman. He said to Father Benwell, 'Whatever your business may be with Mr. Romaine, we advise you to enter on it without delay. Shall we leave the room?'

'Certainly not,' Father Benwell answered.

‘The more witnesses are present, the more relieved I shall feel.’ He turned to his travelling companion. ‘Let Mr. Romaine’s lawyer,’ he resumed, ‘state what our business is.’

The grey-headed gentleman stepped forward.

‘Are you able to attend to me, sir?’ he asked.

Romaine, reclining in his chair, apparently lost to all interest in what was going on, heard and answered. The weak tones of his voice failed to reach my ear at the other end of the room. The lawyer, seeming to be satisfied so far, put a formal question to the doctors next. He inquired if Mr Romaine was in full possession of his faculties.

Both the physicians answered without

hesitation in the affirmative. Father Benwell added *his* attestation. ‘Throughout Mr. Romaine’s illness,’ he said firmly, ‘his mind has been as clear as mine is.’

While this was going on, the child had slipped off his mother’s lap, with the natural restlessness of his age. He walked to the fireplace, and stopped—fascinated by the bright red glow of the embers of burning wood. In one corner of the low fender lay a loose little bundle of sticks, left there in case the fire might need re-lighting. The boy, noticing the bundle, took out one of the sticks and threw it experimentally into the grate. The flash of flame, as the stick caught fire, delighted him. He went on burning stick after stick. The new game kept him quiet: his mother was content to be on the watch, to see that no harm was done.

In the meantime, the lawyer briefly stated his case.

‘ You remember, Mr. Romaine, that your will was placed, for safe keeping, in our office,’ he began. ‘ Father Benwell called upon us, and presented an order, signed by yourself, authorising him to convey the will from London to Paris. The object was to obtain your signature to a codicil, which had been considered a necessary addition to secure the validity of the will.—Are you favouring me with your attention, sir? ’

Romaine answered by a slight bending of his head. His eyes were fixed on the boy—still absorbed in throwing his sticks, one by one, into the fire.

‘ At the time when your will was executed,’ the lawyer went on, ‘ Father Ben-

well obtained your permission to take a copy of it. Hearing of your illness, he submitted the copy to a high legal authority. The written opinion of this competent person declares the clause, bequeathing the Vange estate to the Roman Church, to be so imperfectly expressed, that the will might be made a subject of litigation after the testator's death. He has accordingly appended a form of codicil amending the defect, and we have added it to the will. I thought it my duty, as one of your legal advisers, to accompany Father Benwell on his return to Paris in charge of the will—in case you might feel disposed to make any alteration.' He looked towards Stella and the child, as he completed that sentence. Father Benwell's keen eyes took the same direction. 'Shall I read the will, sir?' the lawyer re-

sumed ; ‘ or would you prefer to look at it yourself ? ’

Romayne held out his hand for the will, in silence. He was still watching his son. There were but few more sticks now left to be thrown in the fire.

Father Benwell interfered, for the first time.

‘ One word, Mr. Romayne, before you examine that document,’ he said. ‘ The Church receives back from you the property which was once its own. Beyond that, it authorises and even desires you (by my voice) to make any changes which you or your trusted legal adviser may think right. I refer to the clauses of the will which relate to the property you have inherited from the late Lady Berrick—and I beg the

persons present to bear in memory the few plain words that I have now spoken.'

He bowed with dignity, and drew back. Even the lawyer was favourably impressed. The doctors looked at each other with silent approval. For the first time, the sad repose of Stella's face was disturbed—I could see that it cost her an effort to repress her indignation. The one unmoved person was Romaine. The sheet of paper on which the will was written lay unregarded upon his lap; his eyes were still riveted on the little figure at the fireplace.

The child had thrown his last stick into the glowing red embers. He looked about him for a fresh supply, and found nothing. His fresh young voice rose high through the silence in the room.

'More!' he cried. 'More!'

His mother held up a warning finger. ‘Hush!’ she whispered. He shrank away from her, as she tried to take him on her knee, and looked across the room at his father. ‘More!’ he burst out, louder than ever.

Romayne beckoned to me, and pointed to the boy.

I led him across the room. He was quite willing to go with me—he reiterated his petition, standing at his father’s knees.

‘Lift him to me,’ said Romayne.

I could barely hear the words: even his strength to whisper seemed to be fast leaving him. He kissed his son—with a panting fatigue under that trifling exertion, pitiable to see. As I placed the boy on his feet again, he looked up at his dying father, with the one idea still in his mind.

‘More, papa! More!’

Romayne put the will into his hand.

The child’s eyes sparkled. ‘Burn?’ he asked eagerly.

‘Yes!’

Father Benwell sprang forward, with outstretched hands. I stopped him. He struggled with me. I forgot the privilege of the black robe. I took him by the throat.

The boy threw the will into the fire. ‘Oh!’ he shouted in high delight, and clapped his chubby hands as the bright little blaze flew up the chimney. I released the priest.

In a frenzy of rage and despair, he looked round at the persons in the room. ‘I take you all to witness,’ he cried, ‘this is an act of madness!’

‘You yourself declared just now,’ said the lawyer, ‘that Mr. Romaine was in perfect possession of his faculties.’

The baffled Jesuit turned furiously on the dying man. They looked at each other.

For one awful moment Romaine’s eyes brightened, Romaine’s voice rallied its power, as if life was returning to him. Frowning darkly, the priest put his question.

‘What did you do it for?’

Quietly and firmly the answer came.

‘Wife and child.’

The last long-drawn sigh rose and fell. With those sacred words on his lips, Romaine died.

London, 6th May.—At Stella’s request, I have returned to Penrose—with but one

fellow-traveller. My dear old companion, the dog, is coiled up, fast asleep at my feet, while I write these lines. Penrose has gained strength enough to keep me company in the sitting-room. In a few days more he will see Stella again.

What instructions reached the Embassy from Rome—whether Romaine received the last sacrament at the earlier period of his illness—we never heard. No objection was made, when Lord Loring proposed to remove the body to England, to be buried in the family vault at Vange Abbey.

I had undertaken to give the necessary directions for the funeral, on my arrival in London. Returning to the hotel, I met Father Benwell in the street. I tried to pass on. He deliberately stopped me.

‘How is Mrs. Romaine?’ he asked—

with that infernal suavity which he seems always to have at command. ‘Fairly well, I hope? And the boy? Ah, he little thought how he was changing his prospects for the better, when he made that blaze in the fire! Pardon me, Mr. Winterfield, you don’t seem to be quite so cordial as usual. Perhaps you are thinking of your inconsiderate assault on my throat? Let us forgive and forget. Or, perhaps, you object to my having converted poor Romaine, and to my being ready to accept from him the restoration of the property of the Church. In both cases I only did my duty as a priest. You are a liberal-minded man. Surely I deserve a favourable construction of my conduct?’

I really could not endure this. ‘I have my own opinion of what you deserve,’ I

answered. 'Don't provoke me to mention it.'

He eyed me with a sinister smile.

'I am not so old as I look,' he said; 'I may live another twenty years!'

'Well?' I asked.

'Well,' he answered, 'much may happen in twenty years!'

With that, he left me. If he means any further mischief, I can tell him this—he will find Me in his way.

To turn to a more pleasant subject. Reflecting on all that had passed at my memorable interview with Romaine, I felt some surprise that one of the persons present had made no effort to prevent the burning of the will. It was not to be expected of Stella—or of the doctors, who had no interest in the matter—but I was unable to

understand the passive position maintained by the lawyer. He enlightened my ignorance in two words.

‘The Vange property and the Berrick property were both absolutely at the disposal of Mr. Romaine,’ he said. ‘If he died without leaving a will, he knew enough of the law to foresee that houses, lands, and money would go to his “nearest of kin.” In plainer words, his widow and his son.’

When Penrose can travel, he accompanies me to Beaupark. Stella and her little son and Mrs. Eyrecourt will be the only other guests in my house. Time must pass, and the boy will be older, before I may remind Stella of Romaine’s last wishes on that sad morning when we two knelt on either side of him. In the meanwhile, it is

almost happiness enough for me to look forward to the day——

NOTE.—The next leaf of the Diary is missing. By some accident, a manuscript page has got into its place, bearing a later date, and containing elaborate instructions for executing a design for a wedding dress. The handwriting has since been acknowledged as her own, by no less a person than ——Mrs. Eyrecourt.

THE END.

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